

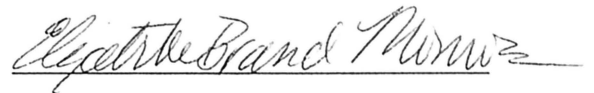
ON BECOMING A VALUED MEMBER OF SOCIETY:  
THE CHILDHOOD OF FAMOUS AMERICANS SERIES AND THE  
TRANSMISSION OF AMERICANISM, 1932-1958.

Cinda Ann May

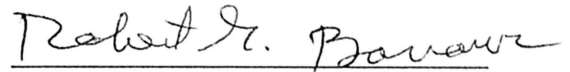
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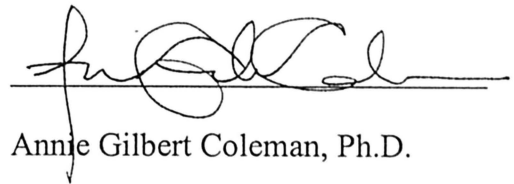
A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Elizabeth Brand Monroe", written over a horizontal line.

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Annie Gilbert Coleman, Ph.D.



For Liz, with gratitude and admiration.

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## PROLOGUE: LITERATURE AS A SOCIAL MIRROR

One hundred and fourteen volumes of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series (COFAS) rolled off the Indianapolis presses of the Bobbs-Merrill Company from 1932 through 1958 with sales exceeding 5,250,000 copies.<sup>1</sup> COFAS addressed the need for books about notable Americans written for children from eight to twelve years of age. The formulaic, fast-paced adventure stories infused with historical authenticity encouraged the development of reading skills and showcased American values. Strict editorial control maintained the integrity of the series, ensured that all title characters displayed worthy American traits and advanced sales. The carefully crafted appeal to patriotism and cultural heritage assured the volumes a positive reception in a society tested by depression, world war and communism.

This is the story of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series and the American society that fostered and embraced the evolution of a new genre of juvenile literature—the mass-produced biographical fiction series. Four factors contributed to the enormous popularity of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series: the development of children’s publishing as “big business,” the impact of “Americanism” on the progressive education movement, a renewed interest in biography and a rising concern for literacy. Henry Steele Commager remarked in his 1953 introduction to Cornelia Meigs’ *A Critical History of Children’s Literature*, “[W]e have in literature not only a continuous record of

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<sup>1</sup> Howard W. Sams & Co. acquired a controlling interest in the Bobbs-Merrill Company in November 1958 when David Laurence Chambers, Lowe Berger and Robert Moorehead in concert sold their shares to Sams. See “H. W. Sams Buys Control of Bobbs-Merrill Co.,” *Publishers’ Weekly*, November 17, 1958, 174(20):29. The COFAS titles under production prior to the sale and published in 1959 by Bobbs-Merrill as a subsidiary of the H. W. Sams & Co. are not included in this study. H. W. Sams & Co. refurbished the series by replacing the Caslon Old Style type with a more contemporary font and by discarding the

childhood, but a continuous record of society as a whole, and—what is more important—of the ideals and standards that society wishes to inculcate into each new generation.”<sup>2</sup> Commager listed a number of values inherent in American children’s literature—democracy, equalitarianism, humanitarianism, family, fairness, self-reliance and the work ethic—which echoed those promulgated in the elementary schools a decade before.<sup>3</sup> These qualities appeared in all of the COFAS volumes. The Bobbs-Merrill Company tailored the production of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series to promote the accepted norms of American society.

The economic and social upheaval of the Great Depression and World War II reminded Americans of the precariousness of their democracy. The United States’ slide into economic depression alarmed educators within the progressive education movement. The more radical adherents of social reconstructionism pointed to the failure of capitalism and urged teachers to instruct students in collectivism and central planning as a means to ensure the survival of democratic living. The entry of the United States into World War II fostered national pride and patriotism that permeated all aspects of life. In the classrooms American youth learned how to be good citizens of the greatest and best country in the world. Students participated in newspaper, rubber and scrap metal drives. Children looked for role models and sought to become valued members of society.<sup>4</sup> Under the leadership of David Laurence Chambers, president and trade editor of the Bobbs-Merrill Company, the Childhood of Famous American Series gave youngsters

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silhouette illustrations in favor of line drawings with color washes. See “The Bobbs-Merrill Story,” *Indianapolis Star, Sunday Magazine*, November 1, 1959, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Commager, Henry Steele. “Introduction” in Meigs, Cornelia, et al. *A Critical History of Children’s Literature*. New York: Macmillan, 1953; p. xiii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii-xiv.

American heroes and heroines to emulate. COFAS secured the approval of adults by stimulating reading interest and by providing instruction in Americanism.

The materials pertaining to the Childhood of Famous Americans Series attest to the relationship between its deliberate crafting and a receptive American people. Located at Indiana University's Lilly Library as part of the Bobbs-Merrill Company papers, 1885-1957, the COFAS files contain correspondence written between 1946 and 1955, a few financial papers, promotional material, publicity orders and reviews. In addition, Bobbs-Merrill maintained author files, which contain correspondence, multiple reader reviews of titles in production, in-house memoranda concerning the development of specific scripts and promotional material. Not every author has a corresponding file. Not every COFAS title is represented. There are no original typescript copies of the stories. Most likely Bobbs-Merrill returned the final draft to the author or destroyed it. Of particular note are the reader reviews that apply the series' criteria to submitted manuscripts. These reports and the memoranda they inspired reveal Bobbs-Merrill's struggle to uphold American social ideals while needing to publish saleable merchandise.

The environment into which the Childhood of Famous Americans Series was born and thrived merits examination. Chapter One: The Crucible chronicles the four primary factors that shaped COFAS—children's publishing, Americanism and the progressive education movement, juvenile biography in series and literacy—from approximately 1910 through 1958 when Howard W. Sams purchased a controlling share in the Bobbs-Merrill Company. Each aspect that formed the social landscape receives separate attention. The chapter concludes with a section outlining the activity at the Bobbs-

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<sup>4</sup> For an in-depth account of the impact of World War II on the lives of American children see Tuttle, William M., Jr. *"Daddy's Gone to War": The Second World War in the Lives of America's Children*. New

Merrill Company that addresses each preceding factor. Chapter Two: The Birth of a Topsy tells the story of the creation and maintenance of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series through an examination of the author-editor relationship, the successful formula of story, authenticity, and the tension between fiction and fact. Chapter Three: The Most Valuable Juvenile Property in America explores the many creative ways that the Bobbs-Merrill sales department marketed COFAS. The Epilogue: That Continuing and Timeless Group of Books comments on the evolution of COFAS into the twenty-first century where it has found new life with homeschoolers. The Conclusion: On Becoming a Valued Member of Society brings the reader full circle with a chronological account that binds the salient points of the preceding chapters into a single strand.

The Childhood of Famous Americans Series, the first publisher's series to employ biographical fiction as its vehicle, "marked the beginning of an avalanche."<sup>5</sup> In a letter to the Bobbs-Merrill Company dated April 6, 1946 Marcella K. Foote, librarian at the Connersville Public Library, Connersville, Indiana, commended the firm for its fine biographies for children. "Scarcely a week passes that some child does not discover how fascinating stories of 'real people' can be and this is made possible because finally your company realized and began to fill a very important gap in our book collection."<sup>6</sup> The Bobbs-Merrill Company gauged the needs of American society and issued children's books that reflected the time and place of their fabrication.<sup>7</sup> As products of American

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York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Arbuthnot, May Hill. "Books for Children." *Elementary English*, May 1953, p. 316.

<sup>6</sup> Letter. Marcella K. Foote to Bobbs-Merrill Co., April 6, 1946. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Correspondence, 1946-1955. Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

<sup>7</sup> Writing about post-World War II children's literature, Sally Allen McNall asserts, "Stories written about life at home in the United States are, over and over again, stories about learning to accept the standards and values of the community, and the community is often defined quite narrowly." See Sally Allen McNall, "American Children's Literature, 1880-Present" in *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical*

culture between 1932 and 1958, the stories published in the Childhood of Famous Americans Series serve as a window in time, freezing for the reader's edification all of the biases, the ideals and the inconsistencies of their creators.

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*Handbook*, Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, eds. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, c1985; chap. 10, p. [377]-414.



## CHAPTER ONE: THE CRUCIBLE

### I. An Industry within an Industry

Between 1915 and 1930 the publishing industry increasingly recognized the profitability of juvenile literature. A significant market emerged due to the establishment of children's rooms in public libraries and the funding of such facilities within the schools. Furthermore, children's librarianship materialized as a specialization within the profession to administer these collections, which created not only an audience for the books but also a mechanism for their review, selection, purchase and promotion. Professional publications such as the American Library Association's *The Booklist* and Bertha M. Miller's *The Horn Book Magazine*, in addition to review columns like Anne C. Moore's, which appeared in *The Bookman* and *The New York Herald Tribune*, provided quality assessment tools for educators and librarians.<sup>8</sup> The Macmillan Company organized the first children's department in 1919 and installed Louise Seaman Bechtel as editor.<sup>9</sup> The other New York firms quickly emulated Macmillan and a new career path opened for women.<sup>10</sup> A close relationship developed between educators, librarians and publishers, which furnished book editors the opportunity to assess needs and to respond to trends. Librarians and teachers influenced what appeared in print and frequently

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<sup>8</sup> DeAngelo, Rachel W. "Children's Book Publishing." *Library Trends*, July 1958, 7(1):221.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Eunice Blake gives the year as 1910. See Eunice Blake, "Children's Book Publishing" in *What Happens in Book Publishing*, Chandler B. Grannis, ed. New York: Columbia University Press, c1957; chap. 15, p. [299]. See also John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States, Volume III: The Golden Age between Two Wars 1920-1940*, New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1978, p. 268, 273-278; and Leo Lerman, "An Industry Within an Industry." *The Saturday Review of Literature*, November 8, 1941, 24(29):3-7. Issues of *Publishers' Weekly* routinely carried notices and articles discussing the concerns of children's publishing.

<sup>10</sup> See Tebbel, *Golden Age*, p. 273-276 for an account of women in publishing.

served as manuscript readers.<sup>11</sup> The initiation of a nationally celebrated Children's Book Week<sup>12</sup> in 1919 and the creation of two annual awards—the Newberry Medal, instituted by Frederic G. Melcher in 1922 for the most outstanding contribution to American children's literature, and the Caldecott Medal in 1937 for the best illustrated picture book—attracted talented authors and illustrators to the field.<sup>13</sup>

The Great Depression disrupted the growth of children's book departments. *Publishers' Weekly* reported in its October 22, 1932 issue, "Now, with a crisis in all business and retrenchments the order of the day, this department, like every other, has been under careful revaluation by publishers."<sup>14</sup> Macmillan, Harper, Doubleday and Knopf either reorganized or suspended their children's divisions. Scarce capital and soaring production costs translated into fewer titles and smaller print runs. A 25 percent reduction in school and library purchases exacerbated the situation.<sup>15</sup> Many well-designed and gorgeously illustrated juvenile books contracted prior to the Depression hit the market at bargain rates of fifty cents to one dollar.<sup>16</sup>

In the mid 1930s a keen public interest in picture books produced by offset printing and new color reproduction technologies developed. A deluge of inexpensive publishers' serial literature also flooded the market. As a result, sales of juvenile titles stabilized and began to increase. In 1935 Vernon Ives founded Holiday House—the first

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<sup>11</sup> The Bobbs-Merrill Company initially sent COFAS manuscripts to Carrie E. Scott, children's librarian at the Indianapolis Public Library. The firm eventually suspended the practice, most likely due to Scott's lack of critical analysis.

<sup>12</sup> The Boy Scouts of America first proposed Book Week in 1912 as a means to stimulate reading among its members. For an account of the history of Children's Book Week see Tebbel, *Golden Age*, p. 266-268 and Helen Dean Fish, "What is This Association of Children's Book Editors?" *Library Journal*, April 15, 1946, 71(8):544-546.

<sup>13</sup> DeAngelo, p. 221.

<sup>14</sup> *Publishers' Weekly*, October 22, 1932, p. 1623.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1624-1625. See also Tebbel, *Golden Age*, p. 478-480.

<sup>16</sup> Tebbel, *Golden Age*, p. 480.

firm devoted exclusively to the publication of children's books. Beginning in 1938, a second children's publisher, William R. Scott, Inc., offered books field tested on youthful readers that combined text, art and educational theory.<sup>17</sup> Leo Lerman attributed the overall profitability of the juvenile market to the large quantities of books purchased by schools, libraries and reading circles.<sup>18</sup> Writing in 1941 he reported,

In these twenty years, 1920-1940, of the 176,500 titles and editions published for the American book market, 14,536 have been juveniles. In the twenty-three categories into which the book market is divided, juveniles rank second highest—surpassed only by fiction with 32,871 titles. “Children's books” have become big business—an industry within an industry ...<sup>19</sup>

The founding of the Association of Children's Book Editors in 1943 and the Children's Book Council<sup>20</sup> in 1946 added further impetus to the field.

Articles appearing in *Publishers' Weekly* in the early 1940s attest to the challenges faced by the publishing industry during World War II. Children's books, with their reliance on illustration, heavy paper and sturdy bindings, posed particular problems.<sup>21</sup> The Manufacturing Committee of the Book Publishers Bureau recommended in 1943 that children's books conform to standards established for adult titles with the exceptions of font size and the margins required for library bindings.<sup>22</sup> The report urged simplicity in format and design. Labor shortages and a less skilled bindery workforce contributed to the spoilage of scarce materials. The December 15, 1943 issue

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 480-484.

<sup>18</sup> Lerman, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. [3].

<sup>20</sup> Fish, Helen Dean. “What is This Association of Children's Book Editors?” *Library Journal*, April 15, 1946, 71(8):544.

<sup>21</sup> See “Problems of Children's Bookmaking in 1942,” *Publishers' Weekly*, July 4, 1942, 142(1):44, 46.

<sup>22</sup> “Book Publishers Bureau Manufacturing Committee Report on Juvenile Books.” *Publishers' Weekly*, August 21, 1943, 144:563-567.

of *Library Journal* alerted librarians of forthcoming alterations in the appearance of children's books. Lightweight paper, decreased margins, the elimination of half-title pages and the filling of the blank versos of full-page illustrations with text made for thinner books in shoddy bindings. Mistakes in composition abounded. In contrast, "[b]ecause more black and white must be used, there must be better drawing of illustrations."<sup>23</sup> The illustration work drew notable artists. The clamor for books soon outstripped the industry's production capability. Margaret Mary Clark, head of the Lewis Carroll Room of the Cleveland Public Library, remarked in 1944, "With limited materials available, the book suppliers are having difficulty in keeping pace with the demand, so book-minded has the American public become with money to spend on its children and a dearth of toys to spend it on."<sup>24</sup> Conscious of consumers, editors published fewer books. They carefully balanced new titles against reprints and altered formats to make the most of rationed materials.<sup>25</sup>

Children's book departments rebounded after World War II. The 1948 American Booksellers Association Convention included for the first time a session on juvenile publishing titled, "Children's Books, an Expanding Market." Panelist Margaret McElderry reported,

Twenty years ago you could count on your two hands the names of children's book publishers. Today over 50 publishers have special editors for juvenile books. The total number of children's book publishers is estimated as over 100. Children's books have become a lucrative business.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "How Will Children's Books Look in 1944?" *Library Journal*, December 15, 1943, 68(22):1039.

<sup>24</sup> Clark, Margaret Mary. "Wartime Production and Children's Books." *Library Journal*, June 15, 1944, 69(11):535.

<sup>25</sup> "Juvenile Editors Give Assurance." *Library Journal*, June 15, 1944, 69(11):537-538.

<sup>26</sup> "Convention Panel on Children's Books." *Publishers' Weekly*, June 12, 1948, 153(24):2463.

By 1957 the number of children's editors swelled to over sixty individuals.<sup>27</sup> Frederic G. Melcher commented in a 1950 *Publishers' Weekly* editorial, "The children's book business really is in a very healthy state. ... Somehow the pressure of costs has been met so that these departments are doing well."<sup>28</sup> An examination of annual publishing statistics in *Publishers' Weekly* substantiates Melcher's modest assertion. Juvenile book production rose 67 percent from 1947 to 1957.<sup>29</sup> The substitution of books for toys during wartime, economic prosperity, population growth, parental awareness of the importance of books, more attractive, better advertised volumes and the proliferation of publishers' series contributed to the industry's rapid growth.<sup>30</sup>

## II. Americanism and the Progressive Education Movement

Concurrent with the rise of children's publishing came a shift in the meaning of "Americanism." The concept sparked a debate that splintered progressive educational theory and ultimately prompted a more conservative interpretation of citizenship and appropriate social values. Historian and educator Merle Curti defined Americanism in economic terms and acknowledged its relationship with patriotism—the love of one's country—and nationalism—the ideology of the nation state.<sup>31</sup> Noting the term's mutability, Curti traced its evolution from Jeffersonian democracy through Protestant orthodoxy to its emergence from World War I as "*laissez-faire* capitalism, private initiative and enterprise—the maintenance, in short, of the general social and economic

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<sup>27</sup> DeAngelo, p. 223.

<sup>28</sup> Melcher, Frederic G. "The Children's Book Business Is in a Very Healthy State." *Publishers' Weekly*, July 29, 1950, 158(5):475.

<sup>29</sup> DeAngelo, p. 223.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224-225, 229.

status quo.”<sup>32</sup> This equation coupled with the Great Depression fomented a major schism in the progressive education movement, one that indelibly altered public perception of the role of education in a democracy.

The progressive education movement developed in the 1890s as an attempt “to cast the school as a fundamental lever of social and political regeneration.”<sup>33</sup> The publication of John Dewey’s *The School and Society* in 1899 rendered education central to political and social reform. According to Dewey the school should represent an “embryonic community” where experience prepared the child for participation in a new social order.

When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious.<sup>34</sup>

Dewey’s work furnished the underpinning for progressive education, which incorporated diverse philosophies and defied precise explication by its practitioners. By 1919 when the founding of the Progressive Education Association (PEA) supplied the movement with an organizational voice, the advocates of child-centered pedagogy dominated the profession and shouldered the more radical social reformists to one side.

Three years after the stock market crash of 1929, George S. Counts, professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University, addressed the annual meeting of PEA. In a paper titled “Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive?,” a prelude to the

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<sup>31</sup> Curti, Merle. *The Roots of American Loyalty*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1946, p. viii.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. viii-ix.

<sup>33</sup> Cremin, Lawrence A. *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957*. New York: Knopf, 1961, p. 88.

pamphlet *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?*, Counts challenged educators to take up the mantle of social reform and liberate education from the middle class.<sup>35</sup> Convinced that the Depression was proof of the failure of laissez-faire capitalism, Counts called for collectivism and central planning as the only ways to prevent future economic disasters and to return America to prosperity. The envisioned new social order would indoctrinate school children against the iniquity of capitalism and its underlying values, particularly the rugged individualism so central to the American tradition.<sup>36</sup> The schools would advocate collective responsibility and cooperation.<sup>37</sup> Counts, William H. Kilpatrick, second only to John Dewey in prestige, Harold Rugg, Jesse Newlon and John L. Child formed the core group of reconstructionist theorists.<sup>38</sup>

The editors of *Progressive Education*, PEA's official organ, ceased the publication of social reconstructionist theory, which they considered too extreme. As a result the social reconstructionists established a journal of their own. Edited by George Counts assisted by Norman Woelfel and Mordecai Grossman, *The Social Frontier* debuted in October, 1934.<sup>39</sup> *The Social Frontier* gave voice to an increasingly radical ideology that prompted the American public to recoil into conservatism and to demand accountability in the classroom. Although the published articles offered the only concrete advice for teachers seeking to cope with a society in crisis, they also furnished

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<sup>34</sup> Dewey, John. *The School and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1899, p. 43-44.

<sup>35</sup> Bowers, C. A. *The Progressive Educator and the Depression: The Radical Years*. New York: Random House, c1969, p. 14-15.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 22. See also William H. Kilpatrick, *Education and the Social Crisis*. New York: Liveright, 1932.

<sup>38</sup> Rugg, who co-authored *The Child-Centered School* with Ann Shumaker in 1928, published three texts between 1931 and 1947 all of which asserted the function of the school as an agent for social improvement. The Board of Directors of the National Education Association lent its support to social reform.

<sup>39</sup> Bowers, p. 44-45.

reactionary groups with the ammunition to mount a vociferous challenge to “Progressive REducation.”<sup>40</sup>

The schools became contested terrain as varied political interests wrestled for the control of the children who represented America’s future. In the 1940s a new group of more moderate social reformers dominated the reconstructionist camp. Bruce R. Raup, George E. Axtelle, Kenneth Benne and B. Othanel Smith emphasized methodology over ideology. In 1943 the four co-authored *The Improvement of Practical Intelligence*, which defined democracy in terms of collectivism and urged teachers to educate children for democratic living. Individualism remained the bogeyman of the collective mind. The work of Raup, Axtelle, Benne and Smith packaged social reconstructionist theory in such a way as to promote civic training in the schools that was not disruptive of the prevailing ideal of Americanism. Teachers instructing children in democratic living could feel and act as loyal Americans, a fact that was particularly important with the world at war.<sup>41</sup>

As the United States entered World War II, conservative adversaries of educational progressivism emphasized patriotism, citizenship, literacy and vocational training.<sup>42</sup> The tenets of such dogma as “one-hundred-percent American,” espoused by groups like the American Legion, the Boy Scouts of America, the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Ku Klux Klan, collided with the reconstructionists’ belief that rugged individualism undermined the democratic way of life.<sup>43</sup> A rising tide of anti-communism engulfed the United States and permeated all aspects of American life. The

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<sup>40</sup> For a discussion on the public reaction to progressive education see Rober W. Iverson, *The Communists & the Schools*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., c1959.

<sup>41</sup> Bowers, p. 205-213. Bowers notes that Raup, Axtelle, Benne and Smith maintained a deep suspicion of any individual who refused to conform to the group.

<sup>42</sup> Cremin, p. 324-327.

<sup>43</sup> Curti, p. 232-234.



House Un-American Activities Committee hearings, the Loyalty Review Board and other institutionalized programs relentlessly probed the nation for communists. By the close of the 1940s the concept of Americanism incorporated hatred of communism, the love of God and country, patriotism and an aversion towards social reform in general and progressive ideology in particular.<sup>44</sup>

The hegemonic struggle extended into the classroom where it manifested as loyalty oaths for teachers, recitations of the pledge of allegiance, flag saluting and patriotic pageantry by students and the scrutiny of textbooks by special interest groups for the perceived usurpation of traditional American values.<sup>45</sup> The National Education Association's *The Code of the Good American*, issued to 500,000 school children during World War II, outlined expected behavior. The "good American" demonstrated a concern for humanity; displayed loyalty to family, community and country; exhibited reliability and a cooperative spirit; and treated all individuals in a kind and honest manner.<sup>46</sup> Leo Lerman asserted in 1941 that by publishing juvenile books the trade "is aiding our youth to a knowledge of problems of the day which must help them to face the future with courage."<sup>47</sup> In a world of social and economic uncertainty, books and reading prepared children for active and intelligent participation in American democracy.

In 1943, Grace Allen Hogarth, children's editor at Houghton-Mifflin, admonished her *Publishers' Weekly* audience. "President Roosevelt," she wrote, "has reminded us that books are weapons in this war. Children's books are the steel and the stone, and the

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<sup>44</sup> Chafe, William H. *The Unfinished Journey: America since World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 108.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237; see also Tuttle, p. 118-119.

<sup>46</sup> National Education Association. *The Code of the Good American*. [Personal Growth Leaflet No. 62]. Washington: NEA n.d., pp. 3-15 as cited in Tuttle, p. 118.

<sup>47</sup> Lerman, p. 7.

bricks and mortar that will build the future. And every scrap of paper that we put into them should insure that they are of the best possible quality to this end.”<sup>48</sup> Hogarth’s point—that books prepare American youth for their future role in “the new world order”—underlies a *Publishers’ Weekly* article by Vernon Ives, founder of Holiday House and Chairman of the Children’s Book Committee of the Council on Books in Wartime.

Ives noted three effects of the war on children’s books: the increased publication of titles concerning all aspects of the armed forces, more volumes recounting the impact of war on people in other countries and the “added emphasis to that continuing and timeless group of books that interpret our democracy.”<sup>49</sup> He urged publishers to “thoughtfully” assist American youth, “the rebuilders of a devastated world.”<sup>50</sup> These comments reflected more than an industry grappling with wartime paper, cloth and metal shortages to meet public demand. They represented the publishers’ shared conviction of the role of books in the preservation of American culture.

### III. Crazy for Biography

Americanism, economic depression, patriotism generated by two world wars and the pervasive fear of communism inspired a renewed interest in biography as a means to edify readers and to reinforce American ideals through literacy. Realism and authenticity provided the key elements for the genre. Writing for *Publishers’ Weekly* in 1929, Mary Frank, the head of Horace Liveright’s juvenile department, lamented the anemic quality

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<sup>48</sup> Hogarth, Grace Allen. “Children’s Books in a World at War.” *Publishers’ Weekly*, April 24, 1943, p. 1647.

<sup>49</sup> Ives, Vernon. “Children’s Books and the War.” *Publishers’ Weekly*, October 23, 1943, p. 1592.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1593.

of biography produced for children at a time in their lives when historical figures first fired their imaginations. “The fact is,” Frank complained, “that young people are not supposed to care to read about people who cannot be set up on a pedestal and worshipped as demigods. They must not have their illusions smudged, they must believe in goodness, personified, deified.”<sup>51</sup> Frank cited how an author of her acquaintance employed a fictional tale of good and evil to portray historical characters with some degree of veracity. The necessity to cloak the truth troubled Frank who declared, “This all seems to me to be falling in line with the pattern of standardization peculiar to America which requires thinking and writing along the dotted line.”<sup>52</sup> The transmission of Americanism to each successive generation depended upon the establishment of a canon of values and beliefs over dissenting voices.

The 1932 Children’s Book Week theme, Young America’s Book Parade, seemed particularly patriotic to Katherine Ulrich, editor of the *Saturday Review of Literature*’s “Children’s Bookshelf.” Ulrich remarked on the positive quality of books to introduce American culture and heritage to children.<sup>53</sup> In her review of perennial favorites and new titles Ulrich noted, “A rush of American consciousness spurred, perhaps, by the Washington Bicentennial has resulted in renewed efforts on the part of authors to interest boys and girls in the lives of our heroes.”<sup>54</sup> Among the new biographical titles Ulrich examined was Augusta Stevenson’s *Abe Lincoln, Frontier Boy*, destined to be the first volume of the Bobbs-Merrill Company’s Childhood of Famous Americans Series.

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<sup>51</sup> Frank, Mary. “Among the Children’s Books: What There Is and What There Isn’t.” *Publishers’ Weekly*, March 30, 1929, 115(13):1593.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1594.

<sup>53</sup> Ulrich, Katherine. “Young America’s Book Parade: This Patriotic Book Week Theme Issues a Challenge to Every Bookseller’s Imagination.” *Publishers’ Weekly*, October 22, 1932, p. 1616.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1618.

Publishers issued juvenile biographies in the 1930s that conformed to a formulaic boilerplate created in response to the requests of teachers and librarians. According to May Hill Arbuthnot, “Committees of educators even approach publishers with the new subject-matter needs of the schools which reflect these national trends. Whether the latest slogan is ‘Hands Across the Border’ or ‘Racial Tolerance’ or ‘One World,’ there is a flourishing crop of new juveniles devoted to the current theme.”<sup>55</sup> Arbuthnot urged parents to learn how to differentiate a good story from the ready-made type infused with propaganda.<sup>56</sup> Writing almost twenty years later, Cornelia Meigs referred to these made-to-order biographies as the “dark side” of children’s publishing in the 1930s.<sup>57</sup>

During the 1940s authors and publishers rediscovered America due in part to a trend labeled by Meigs as the “know-your-own-land movement.”<sup>58</sup> In his 1941 review of the new “historico-fiction” titles Allan Nevins noted in the *Saturday Literary Review* the continued popularity of biographical fiction and the silent insertion of propaganda. “National unity,” wrote Nevins, “seems to be emphasized a bit more than in the past.”<sup>59</sup> The renewed interest in American history and especially in biographies for young readers established the latter as a genre in its own right.<sup>60</sup> The spate of publisher-generated juvenile biographies showcasing American traditions and values in authentic settings dates to this period.

In her 1947 textbook, *Children and Books*, May Hill Arbuthnot attributed the rise in the number of juvenile biographies and histories to an increased concern for

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<sup>55</sup> Arbuthnot, May Hill. *Children and Books*. Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., c1947, p. 397.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Meigs, p. 441.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 444-447.

<sup>59</sup> Nevins, Allan. “Historical Tales.” *The Saturday Review of Literature*, November 8, 1941, 24(29):8.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.; see also DeAngelo, p. 229.

democracy prompted by the World War II experience.<sup>61</sup> She cautioned that authors writing biographies for a young audience frequently concocted dialogue and explained the mental landscapes of their characters, thus giving a fictional cast to actual events.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, Arbuthnot acknowledged the genre's popularity noting that, "One school librarian reports that in the last ten years the voluntary withdrawal of biography ... has doubled and trebled. Biographies no longer gather dust on library shelves but circulate rapidly and continuously."<sup>63</sup> Arbuthnot examined biography in terms of history, personage and literature. She distinguished "fictionalized biography" from "biographical fiction," and classified both types as "hybrids" of the genre.

According to Arbuthnot, fictionalized biography dramatized the documented incidents of the hero's life primarily through invented dialogue. The story derived its authenticity from the author's meticulous research into the time, the place and the material culture of the setting. The degree to which the authenticity succeeded depended upon whether or not an author thoroughly investigated her subject. In contrast, biographical fiction employed a historical personage or a fact as the springboard for its imagined events and conversations, a technique popularized by Parson Weems in his *Life of George Washington*. Arbuthnot categorized Augusta Stevenson's books, *Abe Lincoln*, *Frontier Boy* and *Ben Franklin, Printer's Boy*, as biographical fiction. She remarked, "In spite of the fact that these books give authentic stories about the men, their framework is palpably fictionalized and the characters and the situations are considerably worked over and elaborated."<sup>64</sup> As the juvenile biography craze of the 1940s gained momentum,

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<sup>61</sup> Arbuthnot. *Children and Books*, p. 27.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 478.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 470.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 480.

Arbuthnot's subtle distinction between fictionalized biography and biographical fiction crumbled.<sup>65</sup>

Annual surveys conducted by the Center for Children's Books at the University of Chicago illustrated the upsurge of interest in biography. Evaluating 2,159 fiction titles published between 1948 and 1953, the Center discovered that the number of biographies published for children grew 5 percent. Interpreting these results, Mary K. Eakin remarked, "The increase in biography is due in part to two new series on the lives of famous Americans ... and to several of the series on American history that have included biographies among their titles. The majority of the 1951-53 titles in the biography category are from publishers' series."<sup>66</sup> May Hill Arbuthnot observed that the flurry of biographies issued from at least six firms and resulted in such duplication of subjects that one had difficulty differentiating between the titles.<sup>67</sup> In reference to the quality of the publishers' output Arbuthnot stated,

And on the whole, they are doing it well with respect both for the child's capacities and for historical authenticity. Gone are the cherry tree episodes. These juvenile biographies are fictionalized but the invented conversations are generally based on the evidence of historical record and are used to dramatize or illumine some well established facet in the hero's character.<sup>68</sup>

The January-February 1954 issue of the *Monthly Newsletter* published by the Catholic Children's Book Club echoed Arbuthnot's concern about the plethora of publishers' series; but it specifically noted, "The standards set for the Bobbs-Merrill child

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<sup>65</sup> Arbuthnot, "Books for Children." *Elementary English*; May 1953, p. 316.

<sup>66</sup> Eakin, Mary K. "Trends in Children's Literature." *The Library Quarterly*, January 1955, 25(1):53.

<sup>67</sup> Arbuthnot. "Books for Children," p. 316.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

biographies have been well-maintained.”<sup>69</sup> Historian Douglass Adair also applauded biographical fiction citing the rapacious reading such books generated in his own “semi-literate” children. Adair attributed the success of publishers’ series to the revamping and modernization of the Parson Weems formula. He credited the Bobbs-Merrill Company with the rediscovery and the employment of the genre as the foundation of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series. For Adair, promoting an interest in reading superseded any concern about the superficiality of the stories.<sup>70</sup>

Simply put, the publisher-generated juvenile biographies induced children to read. The attractiveness of these books stemmed from the easy vocabulary and sentence structure that promoted silent reading. Youngsters gained confidence in their reading skills as they identified with the childhood experiences of the men and the women who transformed America. Serial biographies ran the gamut from the biographical fiction that served as the basis of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series to the more historically correct biographies of Grosset and Dunlap’s Signature Series or the Landmark Series of Random House. Mary K. Eakin noted in 1955,

It is in the biographies that we see the strongest expression of the present-day concern of many adults that children have a thorough knowledge of the history of their country and of the men who have been primarily responsible for its growth and development.<sup>71</sup>

Writing three years later Rachel De Angelo observed that the recent experience of World War II and the rediscovery of American history and heroes “may account for the increase

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<sup>69</sup> Memorandum. David Laurence Chambers To the Salesmen, [n.d.]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material II. Chambers quotes statement from *Catholic Children’s Book Club Monthly Newsletter*, January-February 1954.

<sup>70</sup> Adair, Douglass. “Parson Weems, Streamlined.” *The New York Times Book Review*, “Children’s Book Section,” November 16, 1952, p. 4.

of biography and history.”<sup>72</sup> Between 1947 and 1957 the publication of juvenile biographies increased sufficiently to make the genre the second most popular literary form behind science books.<sup>73</sup> By 1958 fifty-four publishing houses churned out 148 juvenile series that stressed history, biography and science.<sup>74</sup> The made-to-order biographical fiction of the 1930s exploded in popularity during the 1940s as cultural heritage literature, which furnished a vehicle for the transmission of Americanism. By the 1950s the genre continued to find an audience, but the new serial biographies moved away from the fictional aspect and offered young readers more factual material.

From the 1930s through the 1950s other forms of leisure entertainment—radio, motion pictures, television, comic books and magazines—claimed children’s attention. This development did not escape the notice of the publishing industry, which took advantage of the new media to promote books. Random House in particular seized the opportunity to market its Landmark Series through recorded dramatic readings, filmstrips and the made-for-television movie of Armstrong Sperry’s *John Paul Jones*.<sup>75</sup> By 1958 twenty-four radio and television programs dedicated to juvenile literature featured story hours, book discussions and author interviews, all of which fueled the public’s interest in reading.<sup>76</sup> Book publishers and their media counterparts did not suffer from the debates that rocked education. Profit motivated the industries, which became increasingly adept at discovering what the American public desired and fulfilling the need.<sup>77</sup> Publishers

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<sup>71</sup> Eakin, “Trends,” p. 55.

<sup>72</sup> De Angelo, p. 229.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Bonino, Louise. “The Landmark Story.” *Publisher’s Weekly*, 170(5):462-463; July 30, 1956.

<sup>76</sup> De Angelo, p. 227.

<sup>77</sup> Strickland, Charles E. and Andrew M. Ambrose. “The Baby Boom, Prosperity and the Changing Worlds of Children, 1945-1963” in *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, c1985, Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, eds., p. 558. According to Strickland



took advantage of the tie-ins presented by other media to further sales. New technologies and an explosion of information sources demanded a more literate populace. The willingness of children to read biography gratified parents and educators by addressing two problems at once—instruction in Americanism and literacy.

#### IV. Why Johnny Must Learn to Read

The influx of immigrants into the United States from Eastern Europe between 1890 and 1920 put pressure on the public schools. Teachers faced students who spoke many languages, adhered to different standards of hygiene, and practiced diverse social customs. The immigrants needed Americanization.<sup>78</sup> “From its earliest years the public school was viewed as an instrument par excellence for inducting newcomers into the ‘responsibilities of citizenship,’” wrote Lawrence Cremin in *Transformation of the School*. “Schools were encouraged to transcend their traditional limitations and become all-day neighborhood centers coordinating the larger work of Americanizing.”<sup>79</sup> Through literacy children acquired American social values and beliefs; and the schoolhouse offered appropriate instruction to those individuals who attended class on a regular basis.

The enactment of compulsory school attendance laws supported the development of literacy across the United States.<sup>80</sup> Between 1910 and 1913 proponents of the school survey movement tested schoolchildren in two states and eleven cities for core

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and Ambrose, “The moguls of the media did not trouble themselves over philosophical debates about patriotism and educational values . . . . Like any business, the media were intent on making a profit, and to make a profit, it remained only for the media to find out what customers wanted and then to give it to them. Achieving a psychological sophistication that excelled that of most parents and teachers, the masters of the media were extraordinarily successful in keeping their fingers on the pulse of the youth during the period.”

<sup>78</sup> Cremin, p. 71.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 66, 74.

competencies.<sup>81</sup> Universities opened departments to create and administer examinations with Oklahoma in 1913 and Indiana and Iowa in 1914 leading the way. Initially, the United States census defined literacy as the ability to read and write in some language, even if the person only exercised the skills at the most minimal of levels.<sup>82</sup> In 1917 when the United States entered World War I, twenty-five percent of the 10,000,000 enlisted personnel were illiterate.<sup>83</sup> The median number of years of education in the United States during World I was six.<sup>84</sup>

Strained by the need to serve as instruments of Americanization and as agents of literacy the schools in the United States struggled to survive during the Great Depression. Approximately 5,000 rural schools closed in 1932 due to lack of funding. School closures fueled the consolidation movement that relied upon the already prevalent school buses to transport children to centralized locations. Concurrently, an estimated 400,000 additional children entered the remaining schools, which required 14,000 new teachers at a time when the profession lost an equivalent number of educators. Administrators cut salaries 25 to 50 percent, and many teachers received payment in discounted script. Urban schools that also faced a large influx of students coped with a severe dearth of suitable facilities by holding classes in condemned buildings. To handle the overcrowding some districts established double shifts. City schools canceled special

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<sup>80</sup> Gordon, Edward E. and Elaine H. Gordon. *Literacy in America*. Westport, CT: Praeger, c2003, p. 271. All states had adopted mandatory school attendance laws by 1920, with the southern states being the last to pass such legislation.

<sup>81</sup> Good, Harry Gehman. *A History of American Education*. New York: Macmillan Co., c1956, p. 400.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 383.

<sup>83</sup> Gordon and Gordon, p. 273.

<sup>84</sup> Good, p. 384.

programs and services while promising to restore the excised activities when the financial situation improved.<sup>85</sup>

During the 1930s parent and teacher organizations flourished as more people became involved in the schools.<sup>86</sup> Among these a group called the Essentialists formed to oppose the child-centered pedagogy of the progressive educational movement. Essentialists wanted accountability from teachers, and they stressed the need to return to the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic with more recitation and discipline.<sup>87</sup> At the same time educators became increasingly aware of the need for silent reading. Holland Roberts remarked in 1936,

A primary force in the contemporary reading situation is the intensity with which our people have turned to mass production. In the application of mass methods to the production of newspapers, magazines, books, billboards, street signs, and photoplays we have, with the exception of a few remaining illiterate areas, made silent reading a necessary part of the daily life of almost the whole American people.<sup>88</sup>

Roberts asserted that reading proficiency determined one's ability "to do accurate social thinking." A citizenry with critical thinking skills required a higher level of social content in its literature.<sup>89</sup>

Commenting on the decade between 1928 and 1938, Paul A. Witty put into print what many others already knew—that reading instruction failed to stimulate good reading habits or leisure reading in children or adults. Like Roberts, Witty believed in the social value of reading. "Our obligation as teachers of English is clear—" Witty wrote, "it is

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 513-514; see also Cremin, p. [274]-275.

<sup>86</sup> Butts, Robert Freeman. *A History of Education in American Culture*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, c1953, p. 574.

<sup>87</sup> Good, p. 395.

<sup>88</sup> Roberts, Holland D. "Reading for Social Meaning." *The English Journal*, March 1936, 25(3):200.

grounded in acceptance of the concept of education as an agency for social understanding, participation, and reconstruction. ... [O]ur aim is to develop socially competent young people who read critically, speak clearly, and write intelligibly.”<sup>90</sup> The 1940 census established functional literacy as the ability to read a newspaper and to write a letter and it assumed that anyone who completed the fourth grade was capable of these skills.<sup>91</sup>

By World War II the median years of schooling in the United States reached nine, a definite improvement over the median of six years calculated in 1917.<sup>92</sup> Between 1941 and 1945 the United States Armed Services rejected 750,000 potential service personnel as “mentally deficient.”<sup>93</sup> In an effort to address the low level of literacy among service personnel the U.S. Army spent \$175 per month on each soldier who required remedial reading instruction.<sup>94</sup> President Franklin Delano Roosevelt deemed the illiteracy problem so severe that he raised the issue at a May 1942 press conference. In response to Roosevelt’s commentary Americans demanded that the schools rectify the situation.<sup>95</sup> By 1947 the illiteracy rate dropped to 2.7 percent for individuals fourteen or above. Despite the efforts of American educators to raise the level of literacy in the United States, there remained approximately 3,000,000 people in the same age group who could not read or write.<sup>96</sup> “The period of adversity,” wrote Harry Gehman Good,

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>90</sup> Witty, Paul. “Reading for Meaning.” *The English Journal*, March 1938, 27(3):221, 224, 228.

<sup>91</sup> Good, p. 384; see also Gordon and Gordon, p. 273.

<sup>92</sup> Good, p. 384.

<sup>93</sup> Gordon and Gordon, p. 274.

<sup>94</sup> Kopel, David. “Reading Problems of Pressing Importance.” *Review of Educational Research*, Language Arts and Fine Arts, April 1943, 13(2):71.

<sup>95</sup> Gray, William S. “What Should the Profession’s Attitude Be toward Lay Criticism of the Schools? With Special Reference to Reading.” *The Elementary School Journal*, September 1952, 53(1):9.

<sup>96</sup> Butts, p. 569.

was marked by many attempts in state legislatures to police the minds of teachers. To this both wars and the depression contributed. There were laws against anarchism, socialism and communism; and laws to promote Americanism without, however, defining it. Relative to these laws were legislative attempts to revise the history textbooks.<sup>97</sup>

Textbooks played a prominent role in the acquisition of literacy and citizenship skills. Juvenile literature that formed the basis of elementary school readers originated from moral tales intended to promote appropriate behavior, socialization and thus assimilation into American culture.

The population of the United States grew by 14 percent in the decade following World War II.<sup>98</sup> The 1950 United States Census reported that more than 10,000,000 Americans had less than five years of education or had never attended school.<sup>99</sup> Functionally illiterate people made up 6.8 percent of the American workforce and 2 percent of this total could not read or write. Ten to 15 percent of the U.S. enlisted personnel during the Korean Conflict did not have a fourth grade education.<sup>100</sup> Such large figures shocked Americans who realized that the promise of a free public education did not automatically translate into the ability to read and write. The literacy problem as perceived by the American public raised grave concerns as the United States faced the threat of communism in its hometowns and around the world. The survival of democracy hinged on a literate populace able to measure up to its civic responsibilities and it fell to the schools to ensure that children acquired the necessary skills.

In the 1950s the social trend of marrying young and having large families increased the pressure on the elementary schools. "In the middle fifties," wrote H. G.

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<sup>97</sup> Good, p. 525.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 530.

<sup>99</sup> Gordon and Gordon, p. 274.

Good, “the task of providing places and teachers for all pupils was the most tangible problem before the people and the schools. Enrollments were growing at the rate of 1,000,000 per year.”<sup>101</sup> Primary school enrollments stood at 26 million in 1952 with predictions of 29 million by 1956 or 1957.<sup>102</sup> The need to foster literacy in children remained paramount if the American way of life—hence democracy—were to endure. Educators passionately argued how best to foster literacy. The child-centered pedagogy of the progressive education movement remained mindful that children develop at different rates. Teachers debated whether or not all children should be taught to read in the first grade. They pondered what children should read and at what age, but the most important discourse related to the methodology of reading instruction.

In 1955 Rudolf Flesch published *Why Johnny Can't Read—And What You Can Do about It*. Flesch offered a highly personal and emotionally charged portrait of the literacy problem in the United States. “Reading means getting meaning from certain combinations of letters,” maintained Flesch. “Teach the child what each letter stands for and he can read.”<sup>103</sup> Throughout the text Flesch took to task teachers and the public school system. In the chapter “A Letter to Johnny’s Teacher” Flesch stated,

And so reading, in so far as it is taught at all today, is taught, casually and unconsciously, by fathers and mothers at home. The child who comes from an educated, book-loving home has a tremendous advantage. The son of illiterate parents will stumble for three years through twelve hundred words without help or guidance and then, as likely as not, develop into a “non-reader.”

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Good, p. 530

<sup>102</sup> Butts, p. 569.

<sup>103</sup> Flesch, Rudolf. *Why Johnny Can't Read—And What You Can Do about It*. New York: Harper & Brothers, c1955, p. 2-3.

I say, therefore, that the word method is gradually destroying democracy in this country; it returns to the upper middle class the privileges that public education was supposed to distribute evenly among the people. The American Dream is, essentially, equal opportunity through free education for all. The dream is beginning to vanish in a country where the public schools are falling down on the job.<sup>104</sup>

Flesch advocated the systematic study of phonics and provided his readers with an 87-page exercise book for phonetic drill. He insisted on the link between democracy and phonics, asserting that the word method subverted the individual's inalienable right of equal opportunity.

*Why Johnny Can't Read* appeared on the best-seller list for thirty-seven weeks.<sup>105</sup>

Linguists like Robert A. Hall, Jr. applauded the book and urged his colleagues to build upon Flesch's work.<sup>106</sup> Acknowledging the book's popularity with parents, Helen M. Robinson stated in her review, "The most basic criticism of this book deals with Dr. Flesch's definition of 'reading' as word-calling without getting the meaning."<sup>107</sup> In their November 1955 *NEA Journal* article Harold J. Bienvenu and Kenneth A. Martyn stated, "After reviewing all the studies Flesch cites in beginning reading in American classrooms, we have reluctantly come to the conclusion: Either Flesch is deliberately attempting to mislead and deceive the American people, or Flesch can't read."<sup>108</sup> The question underpinning the discourse over the pedagogy of reading centered on whether

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>105</sup> Hall, Robert A., Jr. "Why Johnny Can't Read—And What You Can Do about It." Review. *Language*, April-June 1956, 32(2):311.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 310-313.

<sup>107</sup> Robinson, Helen M. "Why Johnny Can't Read—And What You Can Do about It." *The Elementary School Journal*, October 1955, 56(2):91.

<sup>108</sup> Bienvenu, Harold J. and Kenneth A. Martyn. "Why Can't Rudy Read?" *NEA Journal*, November 1955 as quoted in Letton, Mildred C. "Progress Report on Johnny's Reading." *The Elementary School Journal*, December 1955, 56(4):149.

all children learned to read in the same manner. But everyone agreed on one thing—reading was integral to the maintenance and the survival of a democracy.

## V. The Bobbs-Merrill Company

In 1909 the Bobbs-Merrill Company attempted to penetrate the schoolbook market by publishing the *Child Classics*, a set of primary school readers written by Georgia and Grace Alexander. John R. Carr, a former school superintendent for the Marion County schools, joined the Bobbs-Merrill Company in 1911 specifically to organize the firm's educational department. Georgia Alexander in particular viewed Carr with distrust, and she savaged Carr in her dealings with company president, W. C. Bobbs. During Carr's tenure as school superintendent, he chose not to employ the *Child Classics* in the Marion County Schools. This angered Anderson, an Indianapolis school principal, who believed that Carr actively worked against the sale of her books. In truth Carr convinced the State of Indiana to adopt the *Child Classics* for use in its elementary schools in 1914 and again in 1919. Through Carr's promotion the *Child Classics* sold three million copies. The 1919 adoption, however, did not extend to all of the *Child Classic* volumes and it signaled the waning popularity of the readers. Although the Andersons profited handsomely from the *Child Classics*, the Bobbs-Merrill Company did not, a fact that prompted the firm to develop a more competitive series of readers. The Anderson sisters unhappily learned of the replacement four months prior to the 1924 school adoptions. In response to Grace and Georgia Anderson's angry



protestations, the Bobbs-Merrill Company hinted at a monetary settlement that never took place.<sup>109</sup>

The *Bobbs-Merrill Readers*, authored by the siblings Clara Belle and Edna Dean Baker in concert with George H. Betts, superseded the *Child Classics*. Clara Belle held the post of professor of elementary curriculum at the National Kindergarten and Elementary College in Chicago. Edna Dean served as the institution's president. An educator and a Bobbs-Merrill author since 1914, Betts acted as editor-in-chief of the Bobbs-Merrill educational department in 1921 under the stewardship of John Carr. The collaborative authorial arrangement assigned the material for the primer through the sixth grade volumes to the Baker sisters. Betts handled the texts for the seventh and eighth grades. By 1931 the cumulative sales figures for the *Bobbs-Merrill Readers* stood at 2,950,000 copies.<sup>110</sup>

State adoptions of textbooks offered publishing houses substantial earnings and the coveted prize of assured sales sparked fierce rivalry between textbook publishers. Between 1917 and 1930 Bobbs-Merrill held contracts with fourteen states for schoolbooks. The house also maintained agreements with government agencies on the municipal, county and state levels, as well as adoptions of titles for reading circles. In the early 1930s John Carr sought a replacement for the *Bobbs-Merrill Readers*, and the company issued the initial volumes of the *Curriculum Reader* in 1934. Once more the company turned to Clara Belle and Edna Dean Baker to prepare the texts. Two years later an edition for Catholic schools appeared as the *Catholic Curriculum Readers*. Material relating to the development and sales of textbooks is scarce in the company's

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<sup>109</sup> O'Bar, Jack. "A History of the Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1850-1940: With a Postlude through the Early 1960s." (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1975), p. 121-124.

papers after 1930, but it fair to say that the educational department became the best-known division within the Bobbs-Merrill Company by 1940.<sup>111</sup>

The push by the Bobbs-Merrill Company to enter the schoolbook market, its connections with educators and government officials, and the expertise developed by sales personnel, all prepared the way for placement of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series into elementary school classrooms and libraries across the United States. Although a product of the trade department, COFAS reached its highest sales mark in American schools where the books became synonymous with the acquisition of literacy and good reading habits.

In addition to the elementary level readers, the Bobbs-Merrill Company published approximately 170 children's books between the years of 1901 and 1940.<sup>112</sup> Oversight for the production of juvenile titles fell to the editor of the trade department. David Laurence Chambers, the foremost figure in the creation of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series, came to the Bobbs-Merrill Company in 1903 as the personal secretary to the firm's president, W. C. Bobbs, a post Chambers held until 1907 when he became a full member of the house. Appointed vice president in 1921, Chambers succeeded Hewitt Howland as the trade book editor in 1925 and achieved the rank of company president in 1935. After eighteen years, Chambers resigned the presidency and served as chairman of the board through 1958.<sup>113</sup> The literary tastes and social attitudes of Chambers strongly influenced the publications of the trade department.<sup>114</sup> Chambers'

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 123-125.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 141-145, 147.

<sup>112</sup> Bobbs-Merrill Company. "Complete Back List of Juvenile Titles from Bobbs-Merrill." [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1961 or 1962].

<sup>113</sup> O'Bar, p. 95-96.

<sup>114</sup> Tebbel, John. *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: Volume IV, The Great Change, 1940-1980*, p. 268.

dominance extended to the Childhood of Famous Americans Series, where he retained control over the development of manuscripts until Howard W. Sams acquired the company in November of 1958.<sup>115</sup>

From 1932 to 1946 assistant editor Jessica Mannon bore the brunt of the responsibility for securing and guiding juvenile manuscripts to publication, always deferring to Chambers, who retained control of the process. Mannon joined the Bobbs-Merrill Company sales department in 1927. She replaced Anne Johnston as editorial assistant in 1931 and moved into the assistant editor position one year later.<sup>116</sup> Mannon participated in the creation of the Childhood of Famous American Series and fostered its development through the Great Depression and World War II. Unlike other publishing concerns Bobbs-Merrill did not establish a separate department or even employ a children's editor until 1946 when the firm engaged Patricia Jones.<sup>117</sup>

The Bobbs-Merrill Company published twenty-four volumes in the Childhood of Famous Americans Series during Jessica Mannon's tenure as assistant editor. Patricia Jones inherited a well-established biographical fiction series based on exacting criteria that fostered Americanism and literacy. Like Mannon before her, Jones endeavored to emphasize appropriate social values in COFAS while ensuring a vocabulary level suitable for eight- to twelve-year-old readers. Exploits celebrating American traditions and beliefs served as a means to confer literacy and to protect democracy. COFAS authors like Augusta Stevenson and Laura Long took their roles in the development of

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<sup>115</sup> The memoranda, letters, manuscript annotations on reader reviews, etc. and the deference shown by editorial assistants reveal that Chambers had the final word on the production of the COFAS books.

<sup>116</sup> O'Bar, p. 94.

<sup>117</sup> Bobbs-Merrill mss. Lilly Library. Manuscript Department. Internal Authority Control Files.

citizenship skills very seriously. On her 1941 biographical questionnaire Stevenson wrote,

In my work as a teacher in the Indianapolis Public Schools I saw the necessity of developing patriotism in children if we expected to meet the Communistic plan of treating our American heroes with ridicule and contempt. And so in Abe Lincoln, Frontier Boy, and now in Ben Franklin, Printer's Boy, I have endeavored to give the child ideals, and to create enthusiasm for these men.<sup>118</sup>

The fear of communism permeated all of Stevenson's work for COFAS ,and it skewed her presentation of American heroes for the edification of her readers. In Stevenson's work one most clearly sees the prejudices and perceptions of American society perpetuated through the vehicle of biographical fiction.

In "An Author's View of The Childhood of Famous Americans Series" Laura Long discussed how COFAS transmitted traditional American values to young readers. This contributor to the series spoke of the joy an author experienced in being part of such an endeavor, calling it "the most successful way any of us know to teach the true meaning of democracy."<sup>119</sup> Long believed in the power of COFAS to instill cultural values. "By following the lives of America's great men," Long asserted, "young minds will unconsciously acquire the seeds of such things as patriotism, loyalty, courage, independence, fearlessness, [and] unselfish devotion to duty."<sup>120</sup> Bobbs-Merrill aggressively marketed the Childhood of Famous Americans Series to parents, teachers and librarians to instill in children the meaning of true "Americanism." Although seldom

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<sup>118</sup> Augusta Stevenson, "Biographical Questionnaire," [1941]. Bobbs-Merrill mss., Stevenson, Augusta. Biographical Material.

<sup>119</sup> Laura Long, "An Author's View of The Childhood of Famous Americans Series," [n.d.]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Reviews.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

defined, the concept of Americanism sold books and led to the employment of the series in ways unanticipated by Chambers and his editorial staff.<sup>121</sup>

An undated Bobbs-Merrill sales memorandum recorded an agreement between the U.S. Department of State and the American Embassy at Bangkok to produce Thai translations of three titles in the Childhood of Famous Americans Series. “This is further recognition,” the memo declared, “of the good Americanism, the good democracy, of COFAS.”<sup>122</sup> Chambers recognized this attribute as a way to differentiate COFAS from other publishers’ series. Perceiving a swelling demand for materials related to Americanism, he instructed salesmen to emphasize its importance and to stress how the Childhood of Famous Americans Series filled the need for citizenship training.<sup>123</sup> The sales department packaged Americanism with the acquisition of literacy skills and sold the books to concerned parents, teachers and school superintendents as the means to ensure the continuance of American society.

The publication of *Why Johnny Can’t Read—And What You Can Do About It* stimulated public concern for literacy and reading. Seizing upon the popularity of Flesch’s work, R. G. Baker, head of sales at Bobbs-Merrill, issued a “Memorandum to the Salesmen” dated October 28, 1955 that declared, “WHY JOHNNY CAN’T READ Because he never had the opportunity to read books in the CHILDHOOD OF FAMOUS

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<sup>121</sup> Chambers, David Laurence. “The Genesis and Continuing Success of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series.” Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1949, p. 5. Reprinted from *Publishers’ Weekly*, October 29, 1949.

<sup>122</sup> Memorandum by D. L. Chambers to the Salesmen, [n.d.] Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material II. The three titles translated into Thai were: *Ben Franklin*, *Printer’s Boy*, *Clara Barton*, *Girl Nurse* and *Kit Carson*, *Boy Trapper*.

<sup>123</sup> Memorandum by R. G. Baker to the Salesmen, July 1, 1952. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material II.

AMERICANS SERIES.”<sup>124</sup> The popularity of COFAS derived from its careful selection of high-profile Americans who appealed to young audiences. The books introduced the concept of biography to children and encouraged the development of reading skills, especially for slow learners, while showcasing American values in the actions of their young heroes. Rigid editorial control and authorial guidelines ensured that all volumes conformed to the series’ requirements as set forth by the publisher. The style, vocabulary, general plot and format remained uniform. The cultivation of literacy and “Americanism” appeared in all promotional material. Marketing strategies included direct appeals to patriotism and the sales department repeatedly stressed that once a child read a COFAS book he became a customer for the entire series.

Public support for the Childhood of Famous Americans Series took the form of published reviews and articles by educators and letters to the Bobbs-Merrill Company from satisfied parents.<sup>125</sup> Some professionals like May Hill Arbuthnot expressed concern over the low-level vocabulary and urged parents, librarians and teachers to encourage children in the development of more mature reading skills.<sup>126</sup> Advertising for the series proclaimed, “Boys and girls establish lifelong reading habits with the Childhood of Famous Americans series. ... Teachers and librarians rely on these books to make willing readers of *all* children.”<sup>127</sup> From the sales point of view, literacy ranked equal in

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<sup>124</sup> Memorandum by R. G. Baker to the Salesmen, October 28, 1955. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material II.

<sup>125</sup> Wilma Ingram to Bobbs-Merrill Co., February 26, [1953] as quoted in Memorandum. From Herman Ziegner To the Salesmen, March 2, 1953. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material II. Wilma Ingram, librarian at Sebastian County Library, Greenwood, Arkansas, wrote, “I have never known a series that have [sic] been as universally popular with children. Many of our readers, who have really outgrown them, watch for the new titles and enjoy them as much as they did when they were fourth graders.”

<sup>126</sup> Arbuthnot, “Books for Children,” p. 317.

<sup>127</sup> Advertising brochure, [n.d.]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material I.

importance with the conveyance of American values. An astute Bobbs-Merrill marketing department offered to educators and parents a product that induced children to read. American heritage and values, authentically portrayed, stimulated patriotism and citizenship and aided literacy. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series succeeded where other juvenile serial literature did not. Adults loved the books as much as children.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE BIRTH OF A TOPSY

### I. Parson Weems in Petticoats

“The idea of the *Childhood of Famous American[s]* series did not spring from anyone’s massive forehead. It was a Topsy. It had a pragmatistical sanction. It was elected by the children, and bookstores were the polling places,” wrote Bobbs-Merrill president David Laurence Chambers in retrospect.<sup>128</sup> In 1932 when the house issued Augusta Stevenson’s *Abe Lincoln, Frontier Boy*, destined to be the series’ first volume, no one at Bobbs-Merrill envisioned anything beyond publishing a profitable children’s book. At the time of its publication, the firm’s main concern centered on avoiding a copyright suit due to the author’s careless handling of source material.<sup>129</sup>

Augusta Stevenson (1870-1976), an Indianapolis schoolteacher from Patriot, Indiana, wrote twenty-three stories for the Childhood of Famous Americans Series between 1932 and 1959. Her obituary stated, “she was the founder and major contributor for the Childhood of Famous Americans series.”<sup>130</sup> As the acknowledged creator of “the formula,” Stevenson’s popularity and salability ensured the publication of her books and allowed her a measure of control in the symbiotic author-editor relationship. COFAS

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<sup>128</sup> Chambers, “Genesis,” p. 2.

<sup>129</sup> Jessica Mannon to Augusta Stevenson, August 19, 1932; Mannon to D. L. Chambers, August 23, 26 and 29, 1932; and Chambers to Mannon, August 24 and 27, 1932. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. Correspondence, 1916-1944. These letters and a draft statement of acknowledgment signed by Stevenson and dated August 27, 1932 demonstrate the seriousness with which the editors viewed Stevenson’s appropriation of material. The ordeal led Chambers to exclaim, “Damn all authors!” and to insist that any claims be paid from Stevenson’s royalties.

<sup>130</sup> “August[a] Stevenson dead.” [*Bloomington?*] *Herald-Telephone*, July 9, 1976. [Newspaper clipping] Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. Biographical Material.



brought Stevenson fame as a children's writer and her books established Bobbs-Merrill as the publishing house that ignited "biography fever."<sup>131</sup>

The tumultuous relationship between Stevenson and the Bobbs-Merrill editors began in the early 1930s with *Abe Lincoln, Frontier Boy*. Stevenson culled incidents from various Lincoln biographies for her stories of Abe's youth. In particular, J. Rogers Gore's *Boyhood of Abraham Lincoln* furnished the fodder for four of Stevenson's chapters. Jessica Mannon, associate editor for the trade department, corresponded with the author and reminded Stevenson that Gore's "stories are not authenticated by historical facts and as the book is copyrighted, you would be subject to a libel suit or a violation of copyright if you used any of his stuff."<sup>132</sup> Scrupulous checking took place as the associate editor carefully compared Stevenson's sources with the author's text. Stevenson insisted that no one instructed her on the use of source material. Richard V. Sipe of the law department believed that only Gore potentially had a case against Stevenson and Bobbs-Merrill held the copyright to his book.<sup>133</sup> No evidence of a copyright suit involving *Abe Lincoln* resides in the Bobbs-Merrill papers, but the event foreshadowed the problematic publisher-author relationship to come. Headstrong and determined to save American children from the threat of communism, Augusta Stevenson possessed the gift of storytelling.<sup>134</sup> Her popularity allowed her to dominate a Bobbs-Merrill editorial staff that was eager to publish a winning title.

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<sup>131</sup> Arbuthnot, "Books for Children." *Elementary English*, May 1953, p. 316-317.

<sup>132</sup> Mannon to Stevenson, August 19, 1932. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. Correspondence, 1916-1944.

<sup>133</sup> Jessica Mannon to Augusta Stevenson, August 19, 1932; Mannon to D. L. Chambers, August 23, 26 and 29, 1932; and Chambers to Mannon, August 24 and 27, 1932. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. Correspondence, 1916-1944.

<sup>134</sup> Augusta Stevenson, "Biographical Questionnaire," [1941]. Bobbs-Merrill mss., Stevenson, Augusta. Biographical Material.

Four years of continuing sales and reprints of *Abe Lincoln, Frontier Boy* prompted Bobbs-Merrill to consider publishing an analogous volume featuring the boyhood of Robert E. Lee.<sup>135</sup> The company turned to Helen A. Monsell, the registrar of Richmond College who penned juvenile mystery stories for the firm. Jessica Mannon wrote to Monsell suggesting the project and enclosed a copy of *Abe Lincoln* as a model. Monsell replied, "I have waited to acknowledge your letter until I could look over the Abraham Lincoln. It seems to me an excellent book, and the idea of writing a children's Lee that would be an improvement over those forced on my own childhood is certainly attractive."<sup>136</sup> Mannon distilled the methodology employed by Stevenson—stories about childhood enlivened through historical authenticity that concluded with a chapter extolling the subject's greatness—and urged Monsell to follow its course.

As Monsell labored to recreate Lee's childhood the editors conferred over the project. Editorial assistant Elizabeth G. Laing noted in her correspondence with the author, "If it [i.e., the book] is very easy to understand and very simple, I should think it might for[m] a sort of companion piece for the little Lincoln book."<sup>137</sup> The sales department agreed and connected the two volumes in its marketing strategy. In a draft letter to booksellers submitted for Chambers' approval, D. Angus Cameron stated, "We are encouraged to have this book written and published because of the fine and steady success of another book of a similar nature: ABE LINCOLN: FRONTIER BOY."<sup>138</sup> Chambers approved the idea but advised Cameron, "For psychological reasons I'd omit

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<sup>135</sup> Chambers, "Genesis," p. 2.

<sup>136</sup> Helen Albee Monsell to Mannon, October 14, 1936. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence, 1935, Nov. 24-1937, July.

<sup>137</sup> Elizabeth G. Laing to Monsell, November 24, 1936. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence, 1935, Nov. 24-1937, July.

mention of Abe Lincoln in the South.”<sup>139</sup> Like its Lincoln predecessor, *Boy of Old Virginia*, *Robert E. Lee* sold well and created a tidy revenue stream for the company.<sup>140</sup>

The sales figures for the Lincoln and Lee titles convinced Bobbs-Merrill of the profitability of a juvenile series devoted to the childhood escapades of famous American men. In September 1938 Jessica Mannon approached Helen Monsell and inquired,

[H]ow would you like to do a book for us on the boyhood of Thomas Jefferson—like BOY OF OLD VIRGINIA?

The latter continues to sell, and we hope it will for a good many years to come. Our salesmen are all enthusiastic about our adding further books of this sort to our list, and we believe that Thomas Jefferson would be an attractive subject.<sup>141</sup>

Monsell accepted the assignment. With the publication of *Tom Jefferson, A Boy in Colonial Days* in the fall of 1939 Bobbs-Merrill launched the Boyhood of Famous Americans Series, which incorporated Stevenson’s *Abe Lincoln*, *Frontier Boy* and Monsell’s *Boy of Old Virginia*, *Robert E. Lee*. Two years elapsed before a fourth volume arrived—Augusta Stevenson’s *Ben Franklin, Printer’s Boy*. By the close of 1942 “The Boyhood of Famous Americans Series” contained ten volumes.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Donald Angus Cameron to Chambers, August 17, 1937; with suggested form letter to John Jones, Jones Bookstore, Atlanta, Georgia, enclosed. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence, 1937, Aug.-1938.

<sup>139</sup> Chambers to Cameron, August 18, 1937. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence, 1937, Aug.-1938.

<sup>140</sup> Chambers, “Genesis,” p. 2.

<sup>141</sup> Mannon to Monsell, September 30, 1938. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence, 1937, Aug.-1938.

<sup>142</sup> The titles in the order of their publication are: *Abe Lincoln: Frontier Boy* by Augusta Stevenson (1932), *Boy of Old Virginia: Robert E. Lee* by Helen Monsell (1937), *Tom Jefferson: A Boy in Colonial Days* by Helen Monsell (1939), *Ben Franklin: Printer’s Boy* by Augusta Stevenson (1941), *Andy Jackson: Boy Soldier* by Augusta Stevenson (1942), *Alec Hamilton: The Little Lion* by Helen Boyd Higgins (1942), *Hoosier Boy: James Whitcomb Riley* by Minnie Belle Mitchell, ghost written by Jean Brown Wagoner (1942), *Mark Twain: Boy of Old Missouri* by Miriam Mason (1942), *George Washington: Boy Leader* by Augusta Stevenson (1942), and *Young Stonewall: Tom Jackson* by Helen Monsell (1942).

The designation, the Boyhood of Famous Americans Series, continued until some time in 1942 when the editors altered the series title to the “Childhood” of Famous Americans Series to include youthful stories about famous American women.<sup>143</sup> The accommodation came at the request of female readers who enjoyed the boyhood books, but who wanted stories about girls. Bobbs-Merrill published the first “girlhood” book, *Louisa Alcott, Girl of Old Boston* by Jean Brown Wagoner, in 1943.

Once underway the Childhood of Famous American Series gained momentum. The firm added three to eight new titles per year with the exceptions of 1953, 1954, 1957 and 1958. Bobbs-Merrill issued nine new and eleven reprinted books in 1953 and published twelve additional volumes in 1954. Either the company’s financial difficulties or the lack of adequately prepared manuscripts prevented the publication of COFAS editions in 1957, but in 1958 Bobbs-Merrill rebounded and offered nine more titles.

The demand for the Childhood of Famous Americans Series steadily increased during World War II and the Cold War not only in the United States, but also globally. Chambers wrote,

The usefulness of the series has developed in ways not originally contemplated. Certainly none of us expected that the books might become instruments of revealing American life and ideas in Middle Europe, the Near East or the Far East, of making friends for the nation in foreign lands, though we were always consciously endeavoring to present ideal aspects of American character to children in their most impressionable years.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> The title page of Augusta Stevenson’s *George Washington: Boy Leader* (1942) includes the series statement: Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Unfortunately, Bobbs-Merrill did not use the series statement consistently, making it difficult to pinpoint exactly when in 1942 the title changed. To further cloud the issue both the sales department and children’s literature professionals used the two titles concurrently.

<sup>144</sup> Chambers, “Genesis,” p. 5. The “Complete Backlist of Juvenile Titles from Bobbs-Merrill” compiled in the early 1960s includes permissions for Braille editions and foreign language translations of numerous COFAS titles.

The United States Army contracted a German edition of *Buffalo Bill, Boy of the Plains* for its denazification program. *Luther Burbank, Boy Wizard* enchanted the youth of Japan. *George Carver, Boy Scientist* appeared in two editions for the edification of Iranian and Turkish children and French youngsters read *La Fille Oiseau (Bird Girl, Sacagawea)*.<sup>145</sup>

An undated, typed sheet in the Bobbs-Merrill 1946-1955 correspondence file contains the contents of a letter written by a volunteer teacher working at a school near Munich, Germany. Military restrictions forbade the disclosure of the teacher's name and exact location. The receipt of a complete set of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series volumes prompted the teacher to write vigorously extolling the books' virtues for both foreign and American born individuals. "As for the German children," the teacher stated, "there will be much food for thought and a promise for the future which they need so desperately. In this complete collection one actually has the step-by-step progress of the building of America by its own liberty-loving people in a language children can grasp and appreciate."<sup>146</sup> The COFAS stories published up to 1948 depicted Colonial America, pioneer life and western expansion, the Civil War, social activism, science and invention. The books reflected the most important epochs in United States history and taken together presented "the building of America" as noted by the volunteer teacher. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series exported American values and culture in a manner unanticipated by its creators.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> Memorandum by Anonymous, [n.d.]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Correspondence, 1946-1955.

## II. The Formula for Success

The Bobbs-Merrill Company carefully regulated the production of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Strict editorial control attempted with varying degrees of success to hammer each story into a template established by Augusta Stevenson's *Abe Lincoln, Frontier Boy*. Story furnished the fundamental criteria for the COFAS formula. The editors recommended authoritative biographies and reference books intended to aid the authors in the construction of authenticity. The correspondence between Helen Monsell and Bobbs-Merrill reveals the early formulation of COFAS criteria and the editors' determination to impress specific qualities into all the books of the series. Elizabeth Laing wrote to Helen Monsell,

In editorial conference today we discussed again the elements we feel are required in the book you are going to write on Lee's boyhood. It seems to us that the watchword of the whole thing is adequate simplification so that the very young child can understand it. ABE LINCOLN: FRONTIER BOY will give you the clearest idea of the type of thing we hope you will give us, although of course, the subject matter is so very different.<sup>147</sup>

Laing's letter implies that multiple deliberations took place in an effort to delineate "the formula" as employed by Stevenson. Acknowledging the receipt of Monsell's story outline and initial chapter, Laing mentioned the desire "that this book achieve certain definite objectives,"<sup>148</sup> but she did not specify the goals the editors expected the author to attain. An unattributed manuscript notation on Betsy McWilliams' typescript review of *Boy of Old Virginia* observed:

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<sup>147</sup> Laing to Monsell, November 24, 1936. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence, 1935, Nov. 24-1937, July.

<sup>148</sup> Laing to Monsell, December 24, 1936. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence, 1935, Nov. 24-1937, July.

The book as a whole should accomplish three things. 1. It should tell an interesting story of a real boy who later became famous. 2. It should give a picture of his time and circumstances. 3. It should be written in a manner children will easily grasp—and must have a story that will sustain interest. At present, Miss Monsell's book does none of these things.<sup>149</sup>

This handwritten comment, perhaps by Chambers, represents the earliest written statement of the COFAS criteria. As the series grew the editorial staff formalized its requirements through written guidelines.

The "Guidelines for Authors" sought to ensure appropriate subjects, authenticity, and notable American characteristics.

The idea of the series is simple. Each volume is intended to introduce in story form a famous American as a boy or girl about the reader's own age. The books are not intended as biographies, though the background of the subject's life and times should be completely authentic. We consider the books only introductions, so that when the time comes for the child to study famous Americans in greater detail he can recognize them as old friends, real people who were once children like himself.<sup>150</sup>

The publisher warned authors not to refer to controversial topics involving minority groups, religion and politics. "There should be no editorializing, no pauses for exposition or description, no drawing of comparisons between past and present, no patronizing tone toward young readers."<sup>151</sup> Authors found it impossible to adhere to all the guidelines. Regarding Miriam Mason's *William Penn, Friendly Boy* Chambers confided to associate editor Rosemary York that the book repeatedly violated the series' prime requisites of no

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<sup>149</sup> Betsy McWilliams, [Review of *Boy of Old Virginia, Robert E. Lee*]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. *Boy of Old Virginia: Robert E. Lee*.

<sup>150</sup> Guidelines for Authors. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Guidelines for Authors.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

exposition, no editorializing, and no anticipation.<sup>152</sup> Editorial concerns required numerous revisions of every title and in one instance entailed a ghostwriter.

Minnie Belle Mitchell submitted “James Riley As I Knew Him,” to Bobbs-Merrill for consideration as an adult trade book. The editors deemed the poorly written piece unworthy of publication and considered Mitchell incapable of correcting its many faults.<sup>153</sup> Anne Ross suggested rewriting the manuscript and salvaging the incidents of Riley’s youth in a volume for children. Jessica Mannon asked her sister, Jean Brown Wagoner, to edit the manuscript. Mannon wrote to Chambers, “I’m confident we’ll have a book as good as ABE LINCOLN when she [Wagoner] gets through with it.”<sup>154</sup> Mannon suggested that Mitchell split the royalties with Wagoner.<sup>155</sup> The file contains no evidence of the final financial arrangement. Wagoner’s revision so pleased Chambers that the company contracted the author to write six additional volumes for COFAS, all with female protagonists.<sup>156</sup>

The lofty aims of the editorial staff often collided with authorial bias. In her “Confidential Report to the Salesmen,” Patricia Jones stated, “Because we have confidence that the Cofas is based on a sound understanding of child psychology, we will

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<sup>152</sup> Memorandum by Chambers to Rosemary York, [n.d.]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Mason, Miriam. William Penn: Friendly Boy.

<sup>153</sup> Anne Ross, “James Whitcomb Riley as I Knew Him (reader’s review), [1941]; Carrie E. Scott, Reader’s Report, September 17, 1941; and Anonymous, Reader’s Report, [1941]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Mitchell, Minnie Belle. The Boyhood of James Whitcomb Riley.

<sup>154</sup> Mannon to Chambers, January 10, 1942. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Mitchell, Minnie Belle. Hoosier Boy: James Whitcomb Riley. Evidence supporting Wagoner’s authorship consists of the sample chapter of *Hoosier Boy: James Whitcomb Riley* and the author’s statement, “Bobbs-Merrill needed someone to ghost write a book. When you do that you never let anyone know you wrote it, or had any knowledge of it. It went over, and the company wanted to sign me up for my own book, but I couldn’t think of anything to write.” *Indianapolis Star Magazine*, April 25, 1982, p.28.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Chambers to Mannon, May 18, [1942?]. Wagoner’s books in order of appearance are: *Louisa Alcott, Girl of Old Boston* (1943); *Jane Addams, Little Lame Girl* (1944); *Julia Ward Howe, Girl of Old New York* (1945); *Martha Washington, Girl of Old Virginia* (1947); *Abigail Adams, A Girl of Colonial Days* (1949); and *Jessie Fremont, Girl of Capitol Hill* (1956).



continue to maintain its standards. There will be no alcohol, no profanity or condescension or race prejudice or violent horror or detraction of American ideals in the Cofas.”<sup>157</sup> Jones’ report maintained the superiority of COFAS over the competing Random House Landmark Series by laying claim to the high ground of positive and sensitive representation of minority groups.

Despite Jones’ assertion, the Bobbs-Merrill Company frequently published books riddled with authorial prejudices and perceptions. Concerning Aileen Parks’ *Davy Crockett, Young Rifleman* Patricia Jones remarked, “The treatment is a little foreign to the series in that Mrs. Parks doesn’t hesitate to imply that the Crocketts were not financially successful and that their hotheaded Irish personalities and restlessness were undoubtedly responsible.”<sup>158</sup> The concluding chapter justifying Crockett’s inclusion as a COFAS hero troubled Jones who observed, “The author seems to view Texan independence from the Mexican point of view, which throws an odd light on American actions.”<sup>159</sup> Chambers agreed and instructed Jones to edit the manuscript. In order to conform to the series criteria Chambers insisted that the final chapter focus on Crockett’s service to Texas and not on the frontiersman’s reputation as a teller of tall tales. “He would never have got into the series just as a Paul Bunyan,” Chambers remarked.<sup>160</sup> The exchange between Chambers and Jones emphasizes the amount of labor frequently required to bring a manuscript in line with the series requirements. In many cases the editors compromised the series standards to publish a book on a popular figure.

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<sup>157</sup> Patricia Jones, Confidential Report to the Salesmen, [1950-1951?], p. 10.

<sup>158</sup> Jones to Chambers, October 28, 1948. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Parks, Aileen Wells. *Davy Crockett: Young Rifleman*. Readers’ Reports & Promotional Material.

<sup>159</sup> Jones to Chambers, December 13, 1948. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Parks, Aileen Wells. *Davy Crockett: Young Rifleman*. Readers’ Reports & Promotional Material.

<sup>160</sup> Chambers to Jones, December 14, [1948]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Parks, Aileen Wells. *Davy Crockett: Young Rifleman*. Readers’ Reports & Promotional Material.

The books *Tecumseh*, *Shawnee Boy* and *Sitting Bull, Dakota Boy* resonate with Augusta Stevenson's intense distaste for Indians. One reviewer wrote,

I think she likes her creation but fears the real person of Tecumseh. She has not succeeded in overcoming a pioneer fear and dislike of Indians, and she has made whites—Boone, in particular—the heroes of the book. She dismisses Tecumseh with “he had an Indian’s mind.”<sup>161</sup>

Chambers found the entire manuscript disturbing. Stevenson's portrayal of Tecumseh lacked the qualities that made him a worthy subject for the series. Chambers noted, “I suppose Miss Stevenson felt she did not dare to touch on Tecumseh's true greatness as a statesman lest he be thought by child readers a modern Communist.”<sup>162</sup> Stevenson denigrated Tecumseh's dream of a unified Indian state and his attempts to create a tribal confederacy to ensure the survival of Native American culture and identity. The ultrapatriotic Stevenson simply could not countenance flagrant resistance to the authority of the United States during the period when government termination policies sought to dissolve the obligations of the federal government toward Native American tribes and to open reservation lands to speculation and development.<sup>163</sup>

*Sitting Bull, Dakota Boy* presented a similar challenge for Stevenson—how to tell the story of a great American who attacked the United States government. Jones remarked in a letter to Chambers,

Augusta has expressed some fear—as she did during the writing of her Tecumseh—that she will be fostering subversive ideas in children if she

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<sup>161</sup> Anonymous, Reader Review, [n.d.]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. *Tecumseh: Shawnee Boy*. Readers' Reports; Promotional Material (folder 1).

<sup>162</sup> Review, by Chambers and annotated by Jones, [n.d.]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. *Tecumseh: Shawnee Boy*. Readers' Reports; Promotional Material (folder 1).

<sup>163</sup> For a discussion of the termination policies of the United States government toward Native Americans see Trazer, Clifford E. “Termination and Self-Determination.” Chap. 18 in *As Long as the Grass Shall Grow and Rivers Flow: A History of Native Americans*. Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000.

shows the U.S. government in any bad light. ... Her own attitude toward Indians seems to be one of fear and contempt, and refusal to respect any of the Indian aims or ideas. ...

I think her conception of patriotism is simpler than that of many children now, who've acquired attitudes from parents with world-war service. ... And the current ideal of tolerance would be better served by a sympathetic picture of Indians that might help to build respect for them, and more understanding of their way of life. But I know Augusta well enough to know that persuasion along these three lines would be fruitless.<sup>164</sup>

In reply Chambers expressed his regret that Stevenson "should have been attracted to the Injuns, since, unlike Flora Seymour, she has so little knowledge of them, so little sympathy with them, and won't go to the trouble over them."<sup>165</sup> The exchange illuminates several tensions. Jones' use of the phrase "the current ideal of tolerance" indicates that not all Americans concurred with the U.S. government's attempt to end its obligations toward Native Americans through termination policies and to pressure the tribes to assimilate into white American culture.

The publisher's guidelines and internal memoranda repeatedly insist on positive ethnic portrayals free of ideology. Nevertheless, both Seymour, the author of *Bird Girl*, *Sacagawea* and *Pocahontas*, *Brave Girl*, and Stevenson supported the assimilation of Indians into white culture and raised the issue in their books. The disparity in treatment surfaced in the tenor and tone of the language utilized to create the authenticity of the story. Seymour depicted two Indian women who served white men. Stevenson selected two Indian men at odds with the United States government and purposely undercut the traits of honesty, bravery, loyalty and leadership ability. In doing so, Stevenson denied

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<sup>164</sup> Jones to Chambers, August 14, 1956. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. Correspondence, 1945-1956.

<sup>165</sup> Chambers to Jones, August 16, 1956. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. Correspondence, 1945-1956.

Sitting Bull and Tecumseh the very attributes that made them eligible for inclusion in COFAS. Despite editorial concerns, Bobbs-Merrill published *Sitting Bull, Dakota Boy*. Stevenson's popularity as an author combined with a story about an exciting Indian chief ensured sales. The high ideals so carefully cultivated and proclaimed by Bobbs-Merrill took a back seat. Instead the editors focused on the development of the story's authenticity to soften the authorial bias.

### III. Authentic, but not Necessarily True

Bobbs-Merrill considered authenticity the cornerstone of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series. To attain it authors and editors researched time and place and framed each story with enough detail grounded in fact to convey to the reader a sense of historical reality. Editors recommended respected reference works and expected the authors to mine them for background material. Script readers commented on the author's ability to create this aspect of the stories. The reviewers of Helen Monsell's *Boy of Old Virginia*, Robert E. Lee compared her work with that of Augusta Stevenson's *Abe Lincoln, Frontier Boy*. The readers agreed that Monsell had the more difficult task, but divergent viewpoints of the author's accomplishments emerged. One reader believed that the authenticity created by Monsell in the story exceeded that employed by Stevenson.<sup>166</sup>

Authenticity blurred the lines between fact and fiction. Douglas Southall Freeman's *Lee* and Mary G. Powell's *History of Old Alexandria* supplied the factual information for *Boy of Old Virginia*. Visits by Helen Monsell to Stratford Hall and Alexandria, Virginia furnished a sense of place. Dr. Freeman read the draft manuscript

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<sup>166</sup> Review, by Elizabeth McWilliams, [n.d.]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. *Boy of Old Virginia*: Robert E. Lee.

and met with Monsell to discuss details and historical accuracy. Monsell reported to Chambers,

He suggested a number of minor changes – that the river probably could not be seen from the lawn at Stratford in Robert’s day; that Cousin Fitzhugh be called Cousin William; that magnolias were probably not plentiful enough as far north as Alexandria to be sold in the marketplace; that attention be called to the huge pillars on the portico at Arlington, and the view of Washington across the river.<sup>167</sup>

In addition, Freeman proposed that Monsell stress the poverty of the Lee family, the disrepair of Stratford, Lee’s fondness for horses, his athletic ability, the effect of the Washington tradition, and “the early inculcation of the ‘whatever you do, do well’ idea.”<sup>168</sup> Monsell revised her script accordingly.<sup>169</sup> Chambers concurred. He remarked to Monsell, “We feel that we should embody all the corrections made at Dr. Freeman’s suggestion. They are important. I am dropping him a line to ask if he would like to give us a little comment on the book.”<sup>170</sup> The papers relating to *Boy of Old Virginia, Robert E. Lee* do not include Freeman’s response to Chambers’ request; but, it is apparent that through Freeman’s endorsement Chambers hoped to enhance sales and underscore the authenticity of the book. In doing so, Chambers further obscured the boundary between fiction and fact.

The creation of authenticity extended to the illustrations supporting the story. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series books published from 1932 to 1958 feature illustrations in the form of black and white silhouettes. Many teachers, librarians and

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<sup>167</sup> Monsell to Chambers, May 29, 1937. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence 1935, Nov. 24-1937-July.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Monsell to Chambers, June 18, 1937. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence 1935, Nov. 24-1937-July.

parents referred to COFAS as the “silhouette series.” According to an advertising brochure “boys and girls see what the silhouettes show: the figures of children foreshadowing great Americans.”<sup>171</sup> The contrasting outlines pay close attention to clothing, material culture, interiors and exteriors of buildings and modes of transportation. Skillfully represented cultural icons such as coonskin caps, wooden shoes, pilgrim hats, feathered headdresses, buckskin, wampum and weaponry enliven the scenes.

Artists strived for authenticity as arduously as did the authors. In his letter to Walter Hurley, Bobbs-Merrill’s editorial representative in the New York office, the illustrator Harry Lees complained that his depiction of Indian huts, which appeared on page 173 of *Will Clark, Boy in Buckskins*, were based on George Caitlin’s contemporary paintings and that the dwellings should not have been altered to teepees by the publisher. “Both historically and generally my work is reasonably authentic in all details. I spend too much time, in fact, verifying data.” Lees lists the material culture sources he utilized in creating the illustrations for *Young Jed Smith, Westering Boy*. The letter contains sketches of the hats worn by the British Navy sailors and marines and the type of cap doffed by the captain.<sup>172</sup> Originally the products of depression era shortages, the silhouette illustrations conveyed a sense of time and place while they provoked the reader’s imaginative participation in the creation of authenticity. The device rendered considerations of physical appearance and ethnicity meaningless. The featureless figures

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<sup>170</sup> Chambers to Monsell, June 25, 1937. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence 1935, Nov. 24-1937-July.

<sup>171</sup> Advertising brochure, [n.d.]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material I.

<sup>172</sup> Harry Lees to Walter Hurley, December 29, 1953. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Burt, Olive Woolley. *Young Jed Smith: Westering Boy*.

encouraged reader identification with the characters. Any child who emulated the traits of the title character might grow up to be a famous American.

The authenticity did not always work. Edward G. Punkay remarked in his letter to COFAS author Laura Long how much he and his son enjoyed reading *Oliver Hazard Perry, Boy of the Sea*. But he took her to task for misrepresenting the events leading to the War of 1812. Punkay claimed that Long's use of the impressment of American sailors as the sole issue for war revealed her outmoded scholarship. A defensive Long responded at great length. Noting her awareness of the War's causes, Long insisted that Punkay misunderstood the purpose of the book.

These are concepts beyond the grasp of most six to ten year old children. It would ruin the thing I am trying to do—which is to awaken the child's mind to the bravery and greatness that are his national heritage and to give him the momentary enjoyment of living in another day and another place than the one he is used to.<sup>173</sup>

For Long, authenticity served as a vehicle for instruction in Americanism while providing entertainment for the child. A COFAS story pulsed with national heritage that coursed through authentic settings, animated the characters and nourished a sense of pride and belonging in the reader.

Through authenticity the Childhood of Famous Americans Series protagonist grows and exhibits American values in his/her adventures. The stories emphasize family relationships, education and charitable acts, especially those involving the care of the

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<sup>173</sup> Laura Long to Edward G. Punkay, January 9, 1950. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Correspondence, 1946-1955. In his December 30, 1949 letter to Long Punkay writes, "But I'm sorry to say that you tend to give the wrong impression of the cause of the War of 1812 saying or implying that impressment of American sailors by England was the basic cause of that war, as old-fashioned school histories, etc. used to teach. But the notion is fully gone, dumped into the dustbin of error by more modern and more authentic historical writers. ... My point here, Miss Long, is that our country and its record are fine and great enough not to need falsification."

indigent and elderly. The title characters are natural leaders, who are brave, quick-witted, self-reliant, generous, firm in their beliefs and patriotic. They lack class-consciousness and champion the underdog. Above all their behavior suits the characteristics and accomplishments of themselves as adults. Each book concludes with one or more chapters extolling the subject's worthiness and the reason for his/her inclusion in the series. The authenticity of the story flows into the adult chronicle of great deeds and prepares the reader for the ultimate lesson that through the agency of true Americanism one may attain fame and success. The "ringing last chapter," as Chambers called it, enhanced sales by connecting the present to the past and inspiring patriotism.<sup>174</sup>

#### IV. Too Much Historical Fact and not Enough Fiction

Authenticity engendered credibility for the narrative, imparted values and served as a primary selling point for the *Childhood of Famous Americans Series*. Advertising circulars exclaimed, "The highest editorial standards are set for writers of books in the series. The historical backgrounds must be exactly correct."<sup>175</sup> The attention to details, the dogged determination to strike out anachronisms and the culling of primary source material for historical nuggets to enhance the story's authenticity led readers to misinterpret the storytelling as biography. The publisher repeatedly disavowed the label, but readers clung tenaciously to it. "We are constantly correcting the belief that the series is made up of biographies for young readers, nothing could be more mistaken," lamented

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<sup>174</sup> Chambers to Jones, August 16, 1956. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. Correspondence, 1945-1956. Chambers wrote, "She [i.e., Stevenson] herself set the formula for a ringing last chapter. It is too late to make light of it; too important for sales to abandon."

<sup>175</sup> Advertising brochure, [n.d.]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. *The Childhood of Famous Americans Series*. Promotional Material I.



a sales department letter addressed to librarians.<sup>176</sup> The company offered copies of an informational booklet concerning the series and its authors, in addition to suggestions on how to increase circulation. Despite the stress that promotional material levied on the importance of the story form, narrative and authenticity, the true nature of the series eluded many readers.

The confusion surrounding the biographical underpinning of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series plagued the series from its inception. Bobbs-Merrill repeatedly protested the biography label, insisting that the stories served as youthful introductions to the genre;<sup>177</sup> but the editorial staff's ambivalence towards the word biography fueled the befuddlement. Jessica Mannon assured Helen Monsell,

You have the right idea in limiting the biography to his [Lee's] childhood and young manhood. You may find some way to sum up at the end his achievements and the reasons for his lasting fame. ... We are particularly anxious that you season the book well with the flavor of the Old South. If you can do this you will have made a real contribution and will have a book that will sell for years to come.<sup>178</sup>

Monsell soon discovered the challenge of writing a childhood biography, fictional or otherwise, concerning a subject whose "early years are so amazingly uneventful that we shall have to rely a good bit ... upon background and atmosphere."<sup>179</sup> The depiction of

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<sup>176</sup> Bobbs-Merrill Co. to Librarians, [n.d.]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans. Correspondence, 1946-1955.

<sup>177</sup> Guidelines for Authors; Chambers, "Genesis," p. 3.

<sup>178</sup> Mannon to Monsell, October 22, 1936. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence, 1936, Nov. 24-1937, July.

<sup>179</sup> Monsell to Mannon, November 16, 1936. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence, 1936, Nov. 24-1937, July. Unlike Stevenson, Monsell inquired about copyright restrictions as they applied to "a children's book of this type," alluding to the Homeric tradition of taking what you need and extensively reworking it. This request most likely fostered a great sigh of relief given the publisher's experience with *Abe Lincoln*, *Frontier Boy*.

antebellum Virginia overshadowed the portrait of young Lee. Chambers advised Monsell,

Our readers quickly sensed your dilemma but agreed that some way must be found to make the boy Lee an individual. It occurs to us that perhaps you might do this by giving a more complete picture of his reaction to outside influences and to foreshadow as much as possible his career in later life by illustrating character traits.<sup>180</sup>

Not entirely comfortable with the concept of biographical fiction, Monsell opened her first three COFAS books, *Boy of Old Virginia, Robert E. Lee* (1937), *Tom Jefferson, A Boy in Colonial Days* (1939), and *Young Stonewall, Tom Jackson* (1942) with introductory chapters that punctuated the fictional aspect of the stories.<sup>181</sup> Monsell remarked to Chambers, “Your reader questions ... whether it is necessary to suggest to the child that the book has a fictional slant. I think it is. His imagination will bridge the chasm between scientific facts and literary interpretation without difficulty, but he ought, in all fairness, to be told that the chasm is there... .”<sup>182</sup> Chambers agreed, but noted that

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<sup>180</sup> Chambers to Monsell, March 2, 1937. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence, 1936, Nov. 24-1937, July.

<sup>181</sup> “A hundred and twenty-five years ago is a long time. Of course, we cannot know, today, everything that this boy said and did. Nobody knows. We do know, though, many of the things that happened to him. We know how other boys and girls lived in those days. We know the games they played. We know the clothes they wore. All of these things I have put into one story.” Monsell. *Boy of Old Virginia, Robert E. Lee*, p. 11-12. “You will read in history how he [Jefferson] wrote the Declaration of Independence. You will read how he went to France to make friends for our new country, and how he became the third President of the United States of America. You will read how, his whole life long, he tried to make this a country where men could lead useful, independent lives. This book, though, will not tell you these things. It is not a history book. It is a story about Thomas Jefferson when he was a boy.” Monsell. *Tom Jefferson, A Boy in Colonial Times*, p. 13. “This is a story of a country boy. He was born in 1824 in Clarksburg, Virginia, now West Virginia. His mother named him Thomas. The boys called him Tom—Tom Jackson. Years later, his soldiers gave him another name. They called him Stonewall Jackson. But that is history. This is a story. It is a story of young Stonewall—of the country boy, Tom Jackson.” Monsell. *Young Stonewall, Tom Jackson*, p. 9.

<sup>182</sup> Monsell to Chambers, April 24, 1937. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence, 1936, Nov. 24-1937, July.

Monsell “made [the chasm] sound unnecessarily wide.”<sup>183</sup> By her fourth book, *Dolly Madison, Quaker Girl* (1944), Monsell reconciled to the concept of biographical fiction. The first chapter abandoned the “once upon a time, long, long ago” motif, omitted the disclaimer, and commenced with the business of newborn Dolly’s arrival at the Payne’s plantation home.

Other authors misunderstood the fictional nature of the series. In her review of Howard Henry Peckham’s *William Henry Harrison, Young Tippecanoe* Jane Throckmorton wrote, “It is understandable that Mr. Peckham would emphasize the historical background, but it is too bad that he does. The incidents selected by the author do not show much imagination or inventiveness.”<sup>184</sup> Story was the primary element for a successful COFAS book. Facts and actual events merely provided the framework.

Charlotte M. Bebenroth submitted four manuscripts to Bobbs-Merrill for consideration. After much editing, the firm published Bebenroth’s first manuscript, *Meriwether Lewis, Boy Explorer*, in 1946. Her later stories fell short of the series’ fictional requirements. Children’s book editor Patricia Jones felt that Bebenroth expended all her creativity on *Meriwether Lewis*. Concerning Bebenroth’s *Grover Cleveland, Honest Boy*, Jones wrote, “She has shown little invention in the ms.—it hews very close to material in all the standard biographies. She has not supplied any fictional embroidery. And what material there is is not handled dramatically. ... The author seems completely at sea in writing fiction.”<sup>185</sup> Adhering to the formula established by Augusta

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<sup>183</sup> Chambers to Monsell, April 28, 1937. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. Correspondence, 1936, Nov. 24-1937, July.

<sup>184</sup> Jane Throckmorton, Reader Review, January 16, 1950. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Peckham, Howard Henry. *William Henry Harrison: Young Tippecanoe*. Readers’ Reports and Promotional Material. Peckham served as director of the Indiana Historical Bureau.

<sup>185</sup> Patricia Jones, Comments on *Grover Cleveland, Honest Boy* ms., March 23, 1948. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Bebenroth, Charlotte. *Grover Cleveland: Honest Boy*.

Stevenson proved to be a most difficult task, one that only the editors at Bobbs-Merrill (and Stevenson) fully understood. When it became apparent that an author could no longer improve upon a manuscript the editorial staff undertook the task, but only if the resulting story was considered marketable. In her comments concerning Bernice Morgan Bryant's *Dan Morgan, Boy of the Wilderness*, Patricia Jones stated that she doubted Bryant's ability to improve upon the manuscript. The editorial staff reworked the author's material and developed the series' signature final chapter. The resulting book, according to Jones, more resembled the fictionalized biography of Helen Monsell rather than the biographical fiction of Augusta Stevenson.<sup>186</sup>

Writing biographical fiction without regard to historical fact was Augusta Stevenson's forte. In 1956 Stevenson created a childhood for Virginia Dare, the first white child to be born in North America. The most problematic of all the Childhood of Famous American Series titles, *Virginia Dare, Mystery Girl* drew sharp criticism from the Bobbs-Merrill editorial staff. The subject did not fit the stated series objective of stories about the youth of famous people who contributed to the greatness of America. An unsigned report stated, "As the ms. now stands, it doesn't seem to me to be a Cofas book at all, but pure myth. Perhaps it could be made into an interesting non-Cofas book? I have a lot of questions about the author's treatment of her story."<sup>187</sup> The report expressed interest in *Virginia Dare* as a captivity narrative, but the reviewer had strong reservations about the story's value as a COFAS title.

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<sup>186</sup> Patricia Jones, Comments on *Dan Morgan, Boy of the Wilderness* ms., October 8, 1951. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Bryant, Bernice Morgan. *Dan Morgan: Boy of the Wilderness*.

<sup>187</sup> Anonymous, "Virginia Dare: Little White Flower by Augusta Stevenson," May 22, 1957. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. *Virginia Dare: Mystery Girl*. Readers' Reports.

Scant knowledge of Roanoke Colony undermined the story's authenticity and shaky scholarship on Stevenson's part contributed to the problem. In her memorandum to Chambers, Patricia Jones noted that she could not gauge Stevenson's inclination to utilize the primary and secondary source material recommended by Chambers.<sup>188</sup> On June 13, 1957 Jones wrote, "I suppose that we will have to go along with a good deal of this. ... For the sake of the series there must be more historical authenticity in the beginning and the Indian facts mustn't be distorted too violently. ... We will have to provide all the solid history."<sup>189</sup> Jones believed that Stevenson's offhand portrayal of the customs of the Tuscarora people and the North Carolina landscape required close scrutiny and verification.<sup>190</sup>

To complicate matters further, Stevenson's dislike for Native Americans, which manifested in her earlier stories about Tecumseh and Sitting Bull, resulted in an emphasis on Virginia Dare's racial superiority. The "Guidelines for Authors" specifically warned against editorializing or negative portrayals of ethnicity. Patricia Jones lamented, "There is entirely too much emphasis on W.F. [i.e. White Flower = Virginia Dare] being white, as opposed to Indian. This emphasis on color differences is unfortunate, particularly in these desegregation days ... ."<sup>191</sup> Other readers also complained of Stevenson's treatment of Native Americans, calling it patronizing at best. Judy Harbison observed,

I think this story's a bad one and that if Virginia Dare must be included in the Cofas series the setting should be as authentic as possible. I hate to publish this in the face of all the serious attempts by other authors to

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<sup>188</sup> Memorandum by Jones to Chambers, November 7, 1956. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. Virginia Dare: Mystery Girl. Readers' Reports.

<sup>189</sup> Patricia, Jones, "Virginia Dare: Little White Flower (for Cofas) by Augusta Stevenson," June 13, 1957. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. Virginia Dare: Mystery Girl. Readers' Reports.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

present authentic Indian material. It shows a lack of work and judgment on the author's part and a lack of judgment and good faith—toward the public—on our part.

But I know it must be published.

Maybe we're all sick of the series.<sup>192</sup> [Final line struck over by Xs]

Nothing remains in the file to explain the necessity of publishing the story. One may only speculate that the profitability of a Stevenson book overrode all other concerns. The company set a precedent for such action with the publication of Stevenson's *Tecumseh* and *Sitting Bull*. The Bobbs-Merrill Company did not publish a single COFAS title in 1957. Nine COFAS books including *Virginia Dare*, *Mystery Girl*, appeared in 1958. In November of that year Howard W. Sams & Co. purchased a controlling interest in the Bobbs-Merrill Company for \$1,000,000.<sup>193</sup> The Childhood of Famous Americans Series continued in a new format, but the guiding hand of D. L. Chambers and his editorial staff was gone.

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<sup>192</sup> Judy Harbison to Jones, August 6, 1957. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. *Virginia Dare*: *Mystery Girl*. Readers' Reviews.

<sup>193</sup> "H. W. Sams Buys Control of Bobbs-Merrill Co." *Publishers' Weekly*, November 17, 1958, 174(20):29.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE MOST VALUABLE JUVENILE PROPERTY IN AMERICA

### I. Just Like Candy

To engage the widest possible audience the Childhood of Famous Americans Series embraced all time periods and professions. In his brief history of the series Chambers stated, “Our promotion men and girls have found constant fun and challenge in playing with so many famous statesmen, jurists, generals, explorers, scientists, inventors, authors, artists, musicians, nurses, athletes, friends and benefactors of the nation.”<sup>194</sup> As the series grew in size and popularity, the sales department invented new ways to promote the books. What started as a polite cover letter to reviewers and booksellers gradually developed into a significant marketing campaign that exploited every opportunity to place COFAS before children and adults. J. J. Curtis, who pioneered mass-marketing techniques in the publishing industry, invented the now ubiquitous multi-colored dust jacket and blurb.<sup>195</sup> Copy art; dust jacket blurbs and circulars; special signed editions for targeted audiences; direct mailings to booksellers, librarians and parents; marketing handbooks and display material; and radio and television coverage sold the “orange books” to eager readers.

The bright four-color dust jacket employed the silhouette motif found in the book’s illustration, with rich and exciting detail. The dust jacket protected a text block printed in a fourteen-point Caslon Old Style font and bound in orange buckram stamped in black.<sup>196</sup> Writers revised copy for the blurbs until it rang with the right amount of

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<sup>194</sup> Chambers, “Genesis,” p. 5-6.

<sup>195</sup> Tebbel, *Golden Age*, p. 124.

<sup>196</sup> Memorandum by Jones to Chambers, May 17, 1943. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Wagoner, Jean Brown. Louisa May Alcott: *Girl of Old Boston*. Promotional Material.

patriotic appeal. The finished text skillfully blended highlights from the story, a comment on its author, a note on cultural heritage and the acquisition of good reading skills, and a word concerning the series' high standards. Blurb writing required considerable deftness and many revisions. An early version of the dust jacket blurb for Helen Monsell's *Dolly Madison, Quaker Girl* read: "For eight years Dolly lived in the White House. Now at last she could wear the beautiful gowns she had always dreamed of having. All over the United States she became known for her grace, her beauty and her kindness. She knew how to make friends and how to make people happy. Everyone loved her!"<sup>197</sup> Subsequent revisions reduced the paragraph to: "For eight years Dolly Madison lived in the White House. She knew how to make friends and how to make people happy because she has [sic] been doing just that all her life. There is no wonder then, that she became a First Lady who is still remembered for her charm and graciousness."<sup>198</sup> Dust jacket blurbs sold the books through a concise appeal to the prospective buyer's needs and sense of patriotism.

The copy art on the advertising circulars also incorporated the silhouette device. A 1952 promotional brochure depicted a parade of silhouette children marching through United States history. In the background are the corresponding adult shadows keeping step. "America's Past and Young America's Future" declared the headline above the stirring scene. Blocked to draw attention to key points, sales copy emphasized literacy,

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<sup>197</sup> Dust jacket blurb draft, *Dolly Madison, Quaker Girl*, [1944?]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. *Dolly Madison: Quaker Girl*. Promotional Material.

<sup>198</sup> Dust jacket blurb, published version, *Dolly Madison, Quaker Girl*, [1944]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen. *Dolly Madison: Quaker Girl*.



American heritage and lifelong reading habits. The text suggested the purchase of COFAS books as gifts in commemoration of national holidays and famous birthdays.<sup>199</sup>

To further the appeal of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series to regional audiences Bobbs-Merrill published special editions signed by the author.<sup>200</sup> The issue of 500 copies included a designation page with a symbol emblematic of the youthful protagonist. For Virginia readers there were the “Virginia Edition” of Helen Monsell’s *Boy of Old Virginia*, Robert E. Lee, the “Old Dominion Edition” of Thomas Jefferson, *A Boy in Colonial Days* and the “Virginia” and “West Virginia Editions” of *Young Stonewall*, Tom Jackson. There were special topical editions such as the “Printing Press Edition” of Augusta Stevenson’s *Ben Franklin, Printer’s Boy* and the “Mississippi River Edition” of Miriam E. Mason’s *Mark Twain, Boy of Old Missouri*.

Bobbs-Merrill ceased the production of special editions in the late 1940s, but the sales department continued to look for ways to connect the Childhood of Famous Americans Series with specific places and institutions. R. G. Baker, head of sales in 1954, provided Bobbs-Merrill salesmen with a list of planetariums in the United States. Baker urged sales personnel to promote Grace Hathaway Melin’s *Maria Mitchell, Girl Astronomer* to planetarium gift shops and to suggest that the availability of the book be included in planetarium publicity.<sup>201</sup> In a letter Herman Ziegner of the sales department thanked a Mr. Cleminshaw at the Griffith Observatory and Planetarium in Los Angeles for Cleminshaw’s interest in *Maria Mitchell*. Ziegner wrote, “We’ll be delighted to give

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<sup>199</sup> Advertising brochure, [1952]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material.

<sup>200</sup> Draft of form letter, To booksellers & librarians in Tennessee and North and South Carolina, September 7, [1942]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. Andy Jackson: Boy Soldier. Promotional Material.

<sup>201</sup> Memorandum by R. G. Baker to the Salesmen, July 15, 1954. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Melin, Grace Hathaway. *Maria Mitchell: Girl Astronomer*.

you a discount of 1/3 off any of the books you buy for resale ... .”<sup>202</sup> By tailoring marketing techniques to specific audiences, the Bobbs-Merrill Company optimized the merchandising of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series.

Each year the sales department issued a circular that listed all of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series titles and highlighted the new releases. The circulars accompanied the promotional materials sent by Bobbs-Merrill to booksellers across the United States. Cover letters proposed appropriate displays and sales tactics. “Your own experience with the Series,” stated the November 29, 1948 letter, “has told you that it [COFAS] is a tremendous piece of bookselling property. You’ve sold title after title in the Series, copy after copy of each title. What’s more important, you know that when a child has read one book in the series he usually wants to read them all.”<sup>203</sup> On March 11, 1953 Herman Ziegner wrote to Chambers and suggested the creation of a permanent handbook intended to coordinate the sale, marketing and promotion of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series.

The notebook proposed by Herman Ziegner contained promotional ideas for booksellers and furnished examples of the many ways to cultivate buyers. The loose-leaf format allowed for periodic updates. “[I]t would say to the trade what needs to be said again,” stated Ziegner, “The Childhood of Famous Americans Series is the most valuable juvenile property in America and you can make it show an even greater profit for you.”<sup>204</sup> Ziegner urged that Bobbs-Merrill supply dealers with copies of a form letter addressed to

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<sup>202</sup> Herman Ziegner to Mr. Cleminshaw, September 27, 1954. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Melin, Grace Hathaway. Maria Mitchell, Girl Astronomer.

<sup>203</sup> Bobbs-Merrill Co. to Bookseller, November 29, 1948. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Correspondence, 1946-1955

<sup>204</sup> Herman Ziegner to Chambers, March 11, 1953. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Correspondence, 1946-1955.

parents that praised the virtues of the series. More direct and focused than the yearly circular, the letter reminded parents “that children’s own eager interest in the books leads them to a natural appreciation of their country—its heroes, its history, its institutions, its traditions, its principles.”<sup>205</sup> With no discernible beginning or end, a child could start reading anywhere in the series. R. G. Baker noted in a sales memorandum “once children are introduced to the Childhood Series, it is like candy, they want more.”<sup>206</sup> Parents pleased by their children’s desire to read eagerly purchased the COFAS volumes.

Bobbs-Merrill intended the handbook and the letter to parents to function as facets of the “package plan.” The idea coordinated a sales campaign with a grouping of related titles. For example, ten volumes comprised the “presidents package.” Bobbs-Merrill bundled the volumes with display materials and dealers could select one or more sets of books for a local market. Ziegner recognized the necessity of offering a limited number of packages. Once established the sales force would promote the four points of the program: the packages and displays; the allowance for the initial advertising; the form letter addressed to parents; and the dealer’s handbook to assist in marketing. The best in customer service ensured steady revenue.<sup>207</sup>

Other marketing techniques urged parents to link a child’s birthday month to that of famous Americans or to build a home library for the young reader. Packaged sets of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series titles reflected regional interest and stories connected through associated characters, occupations, places, or events.<sup>208</sup> In a memo

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Memorandum by Baker to the Salesmen, July 2, 1953. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material II.

<sup>207</sup> Ziegner to Chambers, March 11, 1953. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Correspondence, 1946-1955.

<sup>208</sup> Ziegner, Herman, [Handbook], March 11, 1953. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous American Series. Correspondence, 1946-1955.

“To the Salesmen” R.G. Baker invited comment on proposed five-volume sets. Baker cautioned the staff, “Please do not pass this information on to anyone outside of our organization for it is the beginning of a complete program for the fall [1953] in the COFAS.”<sup>209</sup> Competition from other publisher-generated series necessitated secrecy and strategic planning on the part of Bobbs-Merrill sales personnel. A memorandum notes, “Too many series, with too many books in each are resulting in a bewildering array of new titles, many of them of dubious value.”<sup>210</sup> The Random House “Landmark Series” in particular challenged the Childhood of Famous Americans Series.

## II. The Superiority of COFAS

In her “Confidential Report to the Salesmen” Patricia Jones discussed at length the Random House Landmark Series, which claimed to target the same audience as the Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Point by point Jones compared COFAS with the Landmark books always illustrating the superiority of COFAS. “Does it warm a child’s heart,” wrote Jones,

to know that the Pony Express was merely a business enterprise that steadily lost money? Does it inspire a child to know that the building of the transcontinental railroad was delayed by the muddling of timorous Congressmen swayed by individual self-interests? ... Surely for the younger age level it’s better to make a child feel that all Americans have a heritage of adventure and accomplishment, that there are plenty of precedents for individual persistence and achievement. Patriotism in a child doesn’t grow from anything else.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Memorandum by Baker to the Salesmen, April 17, 1953. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material II.

<sup>210</sup> Memorandum by Chambers to the Salesmen, [1954?]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material II.

<sup>211</sup> Patricia Jones, “Confidential Report to the Salesmen.” [1950-1951?]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous American Series. Correspondence, 1946-1955.

Jones addressed the Random House assertion that the Landmark Series fostered juvenile awareness of history and democracy. She charged that, with the exception of *The Wright Brothers*, the Landmark books promoted an economic approach to history that “is not nearly so inspiring or so satisfying to a child’s ego, as the basic idea of our Cofas—that our democracy was forged by the character and achievements of individual men and women, worth knowing and worth emulating.”<sup>212</sup> In this succinct statement Jones summed up the “idea” of COFAS. She later remarked upon the mutability of the criteria used in the production of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series. The standards evolved with the needs and requirements of young readers.

In the 1950s these needs included citizenship training and literacy. The interior of the dust jacket for Electa Clark’s *Robert Peary, Boy of the North* contained “A Letter to Parents, Relatives and Friends of Children.” The missive encouraged adults to purchase the books in the Childhood of Famous Americans Series and reiterated the publisher’s message of the effectiveness of COFAS in developing literacy, promoting good reading habits and encouraging an interest in history. In addition, the stories “reflected true Americanism; a love of freedom, equality and fraternity; a strong distaste for racial or religious, economic or social prejudice. They radiate honesty, courage, ambition, kindness.”<sup>213</sup> The creation of COFAS required intensive labor on the part of D. L. Chambers, Jessica Mannon, Patricia Jones, a host of reviewers and sales personnel. Ideology consciously created, manipulated and promoted by the Bobbs-Merrill Company

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Interior dust jacket, “A Letter to Parents, Relatives and Friends of Children.” Bobbs-Merrill mss. Clark, Electa. *Robert Perry: Boy of the North*.

connected the volumes of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series and enhanced their appeal to adults and children alike.

### III. This Is What We Had Hoped For

An undated advertising brochure stressed the relationship between the Childhood of Famous Americans Series and the development of literacy. High editorial standards ensured consistent reading material with “simple vocabulary, direct marching sentences, short paragraphs all aimed at clearness, force and interest.”<sup>214</sup> May Hill Arbuthnot wrote in the May 1953 issue of *Elementary English* that children loved the books because they were so easy and interesting to read, and because they exemplified the American success story.<sup>215</sup> However, she expressed concern that their formulaic and stereotypic nature, while excellent fare for “retarded readers,” did not challenge more skilled children. Nonetheless, educators warmly received the books. Letters of approval flooded the mailroom of the Bobbs-Merrill Company. A high school librarian in Sebring, Florida, wrote on her order form, “We have the first twenty titles, and they are helping us solve a big problem with our low-level readers in high school. We gladly give them the highest recommendation.”<sup>216</sup> Distilled and collated, the letters formed the basis of the school edition sales campaign in 1953.

As early as 1946 Bobbs-Merrill sales personnel placed individual Childhood of Famous Americans Series titles in American schools for use as textbooks. The firm introduced the COFAS School Edition in a twenty-volume set in September 1952 and

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<sup>214</sup> Advertising brochure, [n.d.]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material.

<sup>215</sup> Arbuthnot, “Books for Children,” p. 317.

issued an additional thirty titles on February 1, 1953. By placing the books directly into the schools as textbooks the Bobbs-Merrill Company solved the problem of getting the first COFAS book into a child's hands. The books served as reading material for literature, social studies and science.<sup>217</sup> The overwhelming response of teachers and librarians seeking to build reading skills prompted R. G. Baker to write, "Our educational department now confirm[s] that the big bulk of their business is coming from textbook uses and not school library uses. This is what we had hoped for ... ."<sup>218</sup> The sales staff publicized stories of children raising money to purchase COFAS books for their classrooms.<sup>219</sup> By 1953, the heyday of the series, the sales department reported selling the "School Edition" in packages of twenty, thirty and fifty volumes.<sup>220</sup>

#### IV. In Tune with the Times: The King of the Wild Frontier

Promotion of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series spread across the United States via the radio and television airwaves. The weekly story time program for children broadcast by WEAW radio in Evanston, Illinois, included the reading of Augusta Stevenson's *Ben Franklin, Printer's Boy* over several segments.<sup>221</sup> Louise Kirby, the Story Book Lady for WTVR, Richmond, Virginia, wrote to J. C. Baumgart

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<sup>216</sup> Mimeograph. COFAS—School Edition, [March 9, 1953]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Correspondence, 1946-1955.

<sup>217</sup> Memorandum to the Salesmen, [July 23, 1953]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material II.

<sup>218</sup> Memorandum by Baker to the Salesmen, July 23, 1953. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material II.

<sup>219</sup> Mimeograph. COFAS—School Edition, [March 9, 1953]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Correspondence, 1946-1955.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Radio program introduction and closing, [n.d.]. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Stevenson, Augusta. *Ben Franklin: Printer's Boy*. Promotional Material.

and thanked him for the review copy of Helen Monsell's *Susan Anthony, Girl Who Dared*. Kirby promised to promote the book during her program.<sup>222</sup>

In 1950 United Artists released the motion picture, "Davy Crockett, Indian Scout." In a sales memo R. G. Baker cited Bosley Crowther's *New York Times* movie review that drew a connection between the ten-year-old film audience and the readers of the COFAS story, *Davy Crockett, Young Rifleman*, written by Aileen Parks and published one year earlier. In his March 15, 1955 "Memorandum to the Salesmen" Baker noted the rise in sales of the COFAS *Davy Crockett* following the announcement that Disney would repeat its Davy Crockett television programs over the course of three evenings.<sup>223</sup> "This great sale on *Davy Crockett* is just what we need for the COFAS," wrote Baker. "It introduces to the series new readers who might not otherwise be directed to the series."<sup>224</sup> The Davy Crockett movie and television events helped Bobbs-Merrill place that first COFAS book into a child's hands. Other programs highlighted the volumes of the series. The "Cavalcade of Books" broadcast by KNXT, Los Angeles, on December 16, 1956 at 4:30 p.m. featured COFAS.<sup>225</sup> The program placed special emphasis on the childhoods of A. P. Giannini, Jesse Fremont and Sitting Bull. By utilizing radio and television programming Bobbs-Merrill expanded the distribution of its product and increased its market share.

The Bobbs-Merrill Company aggressively promoted the Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Advertising appealed to the patriotism of adults as well as children,

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<sup>222</sup> Louise Kirby to J. C. Baumgart, March 22, 1954. Bobbs-Merrill mss. Monsell, Helen Albee. *Susan Anthony: Girl who Dared*.

<sup>223</sup> Memorandum by Baker to the Salesmen, March 15, 1955. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material II.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Flyer, Cavalcade of Books for December 16th, 1956 at 4:30 p.m. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material II.



and stressed the ability of COFAS to impart American values. Carefully crafted publicity emphasized that the books inspired good reading habits and improved literacy. Authenticity of historical representation linked the heritage of the past with commemorative observances of the present. All the elements came together—the elegant silhouette motif, the dust jacket blurb, the spate of marketing techniques—to make the Childhood of Famous Americans Series “the most valuable juvenile property in America.”<sup>226</sup> The revenues generated by COFAS helped to support the financially failing company.<sup>227</sup> It was imperative that COFAS retained the confidence and loyalty of children and adults. In the end, however, story, authenticity and Americanism were not enough to keep the house solvent.

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<sup>226</sup> Herman Ziegner, Handbook for Booksellers. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Correspondence, 1946-1955.

<sup>227</sup> Tebbel, *Great Change*, p. 269.

## EPILOGUE: THAT CONTINUING AND TIMELESS GROUP OF BOOKS

In its first year as a subsidiary of Howard W. Sams & Company, the Bobbs-Merrill Company published six new Childhood of Famous Americans Series titles and reprinted fifteen others. Among the reprints was Augusta Stevenson's *Virginia Dare, Mystery Girl*, the most problematic COFAS book. The year 1959 also marked a change in the physical appearance and contents of COFAS. Line drawing illustrations with color washes replaced the trademark silhouettes so integral to the series and its promotion. Vocabularies, chronologies and study questions situated at the end of each book emphasized the volumes as textbooks for classroom use.

The remarkable power of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series to transmit Americanism and to stimulate reading skills continued into the twenty-first century. The publishing house of Simon and Shuster owns the rights to the COFAS stories and reprints some of the original stories along with new titles under its Aladdin Books imprint.<sup>228</sup> The Childhood of Famous Americans Series now includes more recent heroes such as Ronald Reagan, Roberto Clemente and Neil Armstrong; and the books sport subtitles that reflect Simon and Shuster's attempt to modernize the stories. Helen Monsell's *Boy of Old Virginia, Robert E. Lee* now bears the title, *Robert E. Lee, Young Confederate*. Currently fifty-four COFAS titles are available for purchase.<sup>229</sup>

Florrie Binford Kichler, owner of the Patria Press and a former employee of the Bobbs-Merrill subsidiary, read the COFAS books as a child in the 1950s. A COFAS enthusiast, Kichler secured the rights to thirty titles to republish as the Young Patriots

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<sup>228</sup> Price, Nelson. "Rescuing Her Heroes." *Indianapolis Star*, Extra! April 5, 2000, E2.

Series. “Patria Press,” stated Kichler, “is delighted to rescue a part of our American heritage and introduce it to a new generation of kids.”<sup>230</sup> Kichler claimed that approximately 95 percent of the original text remained after editing. “The writing really holds up. Also, I don’t like the idea of reshaping history for every generation. That’s a slippery slope.”<sup>231</sup> Like her Bobbs-Merrill predecessors, however, Kichler is trapped between the recognition of the power of story to convey Americanism, the knowledge that the tales are fictional and the need to turn a profit.

Kichler referred to the Young Patriots Series books as “storyographies” in an attempt to modernize the concept of biographical fiction.<sup>232</sup> The mission of the Patria Press is to “hook kids on history and get them reading. We hope that parents and educators who loved these books in their original form will introduce 21st century versions to their own children.”<sup>233</sup> The Patria Press markets the Young Patriots Series primarily to educators.<sup>234</sup> The press website includes lesson plans for ten edited and reprinted COFAS titles, which signifies the continued use of the volumes in the classroom.<sup>235</sup> Advertising taps not only into the desire for literate children, but also into the recollection by adults of their own youthful encounters with the COFAS books. Patria Press relies on this remembrance to prompt adults to purchase the volumes to share with their own children.

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<sup>229</sup> The HomeschoolingHeadquarters.com webpage lists the COFAS books in print. See [www.homeschoolingheadquarters.com/HomeSchooling/Series/Series.asp/Series/Child...](http://www.homeschoolingheadquarters.com/HomeSchooling/Series/Series.asp/Series/Child...); April 6, 2005.

<sup>230</sup> Patria Press website, [www.patriapress.com/company.html](http://www.patriapress.com/company.html)

<sup>231</sup> Price, E2.

<sup>232</sup> Patria Press website, September 18, 2002.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Kichler, Florries. Interview by RoseEtta Stone, [n.d.]. Absolute Write website; [www.absolutewrite.com/novels/florrie\\_kichler.htm](http://www.absolutewrite.com/novels/florrie_kichler.htm)

<sup>235</sup> Patria Press website; [www.patriapress.com/lesson.html](http://www.patriapress.com/lesson.html), April 6, 2005.

The online bookstore Shekinah Curriculum Cellar offers the Childhood of Famous Americans Series titles for sale because of their continued popularity. “These books reaffirm the importance of our American heritage,” states the website product detail.<sup>236</sup> The HomeschoolingHeadquarters.com website also includes a list of available COFAS books. The webpage blurb asserts, “... books in this popular biography series incorporate intriguing childhood anecdotes, informative career facts, and lively illustrations as they tell the real-life stories of America’s most amazing individuals.”<sup>237</sup> Echoing the same sentiment the Just for Kids Gifted Children Reading List for non-fiction titles declares, “The Childhood of Famous Americans series is a great set of biographies for young children and ... gives them powerful role models to emulate.”<sup>238</sup> The 1943 comment of Vernon Ives, proprietor of Holiday House, on the “timeless group of books that interpret our democracy” places the COFAS volumes in context and aids in the understanding of why the books maintain their appeal. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series books continue to address the endless need of transmitting American traditions and values to new generations of children. Regardless of whether the stories are fact or fiction they represent historical environments and deliver the subtext of what it means to be an American.

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<sup>236</sup> Shekinah Curriculum Cellar, Home School Books and Curriculum.  
[www.shekinah.com/onlinestore/product.idc?productid=729...](http://www.shekinah.com/onlinestore/product.idc?productid=729...) 9/18/2002.

<sup>237</sup> [www.homeschoolingheadquarters.com/HomeSchooling/Series/Seriesasp/Series/Child](http://www.homeschoolingheadquarters.com/HomeSchooling/Series/Seriesasp/Series/Child). April 6, 2005.

<sup>238</sup> Just for Kids website. [www.just-for-kids.com/giftednfl.html](http://www.just-for-kids.com/giftednfl.html); September 18, 2002.

## CONCLUSION: ON BECOMING A VALUED MEMBER OF SOCIETY

Once Abe borrowed *The Life of George Washington*. He was delighted with the book, and he made up his mind then and there that he would try to be like Washington—always honest and always loyal to his country. ... Each time he read it [the book] he became more and more determined to be like General Washington, twice President of the United States.<sup>239</sup>

With a flair for the dramatic and little regard for fact, Augusta Stevenson created a fictional boyhood for Abraham Lincoln that launched the Childhood of Famous Americans Series. In 1932 *Abe Lincoln, Frontier Boy* appeared as part of the Bobbs-Merrill Company's fall book list and embodied all of the traditional American values—family, fairness, self-reliance, work ethic, equalitarianism, humanitarianism, charity and rugged individualism. The portrait of young Abe reading Parson Weems' *The Life of George Washington* foreshadowed the boy's later achievements as a famous American president and urged children to emulate both Lincoln and Washington. The publication of *Abe Lincoln, Frontier Boy* unwittingly initiated a new genre of juvenile literature—the publisher-generated biographical fiction series—that met a highly receptive audience seeking to make sense of economic and social chaos.

While everyone concurred that the schools furnished the appropriate venue for the transmission of American culture, differences of opinion emerged in the 1930s as to what ideals and worthy characteristics should be promulgated. Parent and teacher organizations flourished as parents became increasingly concerned about the content of the school curriculum. Radical progressive educators called for the abandonment of laissez-faire capitalism and the rugged individualism that furnished the underpinning for

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<sup>239</sup> Stevenson, Augusta. *Abe Lincoln, Frontier Boy*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., c1932, p. 120-121, 123.

the American identity. The clarion call came in 1932 from George S. Counts who issued *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?*, a series of papers that advocated collectivism and central planning. Professional agitators branded progressive education as “REDucation” and incited the public to demand accountability in the classroom and a return to traditional values.

The 1930s gave birth to “boilerplate biographies” and thematic books on topics suggested by teachers and librarians intended to promote progressive social ideals and the inculcation of American values. Augusta Stevenson’s *Abe Lincoln, Frontier Boy* fit nicely into a ready-made niche for books that conveyed Americanism to children. Recognizing the marketability of stories devoted to American heroes, the Bobbs-Merrill sales department urged D. L. Chambers and his editors to develop and to publish titles similar to *Abe Lincoln* in a serial format. The editorial staff consciously steered Helen Monsell’s manuscript *Boy of Old Virginia: Robert E. Lee* into compliance with the formula employed by Stevenson in 1932. The early articulation of the criteria for the books that later formed the Childhood of Famous Americans Series called for an interesting story about a real boy who became famous, an authentic depiction of time and place and low-level vocabulary easily understood by the young reader. By the mid-1940s the series’ requirements directed authors to avoid editorializing, exposition and anticipation, and the editors anguished over the negative portrayals of ethnic, religious and minority groups that crept into the stories through authorial bias. The tension between a progressive mindset of the editorial staff and the conservatism of popular authors plagued the Childhood of Famous Americans Series from the onset.

Public concern for the acquisition of literacy increased during the 1940s as Americans learned of the high rate of illiteracy in the U.S. Armed Forces, including the fact that 750,000 potential draftees were excused from service for “mental deficiencies.” The 1940 census defined literacy as the ability to read a newspaper and to write a letter, or the equivalent of a fourth grade education. Widespread illiteracy did not fit a growing sense of American machismo and social conservatives blamed the pedagogy of progressive education. The Bobbs-Merrill Company promoted the ability of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series to foster reading skills to the applause of teachers and librarians who published eloquent testimonials on behalf of COFAS. The editors at Bobbs-Merrill insisted that authors refrain from displaying an attitude of condescension toward children, and manuscript readers carefully analyzed vocabulary and style to determine its suitability for children.

With the world at war, publishers sought to produce books that prepared American youth for their future responsibilities in the “New World Order.” Children’s publishing achieved the status of “big business” in the 1940s as the demand for juvenile titles exploded due to the scarcity of toys, a rise in disposable income, the heightened concern over literacy and a mounting fear of communism. The “know-your-own-land” movement inspired by the United States’ participation in World War II resulted in a multitude of books intended to educate youngsters about their American heritage and to stimulate patriotism. The need for elementary level biographies intensified, and the Bobbs-Merrill Company stepped up the production of its Childhood of Famous Americans Series from the publication of three books over a seven year period during the Depression to the release of forty-four new titles from 1941 through 1949.

The clamor for books that promoted American ideals coincided with increased efforts on the part of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Established in 1938 and given permanent status by the Smith Act in 1940, HUAC's vigorous search for and prosecution of individuals who did not fit the definition of "one hundred percent American" fomented a climate of fear and distrust. Americans responded to the implacable tattoo of patriotism and anti-communism by seeking ways to prove their loyalty to the U.S. government as well as the people next door. No one wanted to draw attention to the fact that he or she deviated in any manner from traditional American values, and the self-appointed vigilantes of anti-communism often characterized aberrant behavior as "progressive" or "liberal."

Teachers and students demonstrated their loyalty through oaths, pageantry, patriotic songs and participation in scrap metal, rubber and newspaper collections and the inculcation of American values through children's literature. With the intention to deflect any suspicion of anti-Americanism in the classroom the progressive social reconstructionists softened their stance in 1943 and stressed the need to educate children for democratic living. By the late 1940s Merle Curti's definition of Americanism as laissez-faire capitalism and the maintenance of the status quo had expanded to encompass the hatred of communists, a supreme belief in God and country, patriotism and a distaste for social reform.<sup>240</sup> Institutionalized witch-hunts, such as those conducted by the Loyalty Review Board and the federal employee loyalty program, coalesced with a sense of religious moralism that left little room for deviance from a rigid Americanism that effectively terminated the progressive movement.

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<sup>240</sup> Chafe, p. 108.



The increased concern for democracy evident in 1947 spurred the publication of even more biographies of prominent American men and women. The fear generated by the House Un-American Activities Committee's relentless search for communists terrorized Americans in all walks of life. America's youth encountered the exhortations of anti-communism in school, at home and throughout the country's popular culture. Appropriate reading material in the service of literacy ensured the transmission of proper American values to children. The Bobbs-Merrill Company addressed this need through the publication of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series and introduced the volumes into the classroom as textbooks in 1946.

To market the Childhood of American Series the sales department at Bobbs-Merrill exploited Americanism as an advertising tool, and thus reassured both adults and children that the books furnished safe and "one hundred percent American" reading material. The authentic underpinning of the stories deceived many into believing that the volumes represented true biographical accounts, a misperception that the Bobbs-Merrill Company never fully dispelled. The "good Americanism" of COFAS found its way to other countries when the U.S. Army and the American Library Association commissioned foreign language translations for the markets in Europe and Southeast Asia. The public acclaim for the validity and authenticity of COFAS resulted in booming sales and encouraged the firm to produce the books in even greater numbers.

The twin selling points of Americanism and the development of literacy fueled the popularity of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series during the 1950s, a decade defined by the McCarran Act, which required the registration of communists, the rhetoric of Senator Joseph McCarthy, the Alger Hiss trial and the deepening of the Cold War. In

a memorandum to Bobbs-Merrill sales personnel R. G. Baker noted that as of December 31, 1951 the overall purchase figures for COFAS stood at 1,838,934 copies. *Abe Lincoln, Frontier Boy* alone accounted for 103,913 of the volumes sold.<sup>241</sup> The special School Edition first published by Bobbs-Merrill in 1952 resulted in sales of the series for textbook use that far exceeded library purchases. Children so favored the “little orange books” that they collected money to purchase sets for their classrooms, a fact that the sales department exploited in its advertising.

In 1953 the sales department printed “A Letter to Parents, Relatives and Friends of Children” on the interior of the dust jacket for *Robert Peary, Boy of the North* that declared “[the books] reflect true Americanism, a love of freedom, equality and fraternity, a strong distaste for racial or religious, economic or social prejudice. They radiate honesty, courage, ambition, kindness.”<sup>242</sup> According to the “Letter” a child learned the manner in which great Americans acquired their fame and how “to develop the characteristics you [parents] want him to have.”<sup>243</sup> Just as *The Life of George Washington* motivated a young Abraham Lincoln, children eager to please parents and desirous of being considered valued members of society looked to American heroes and heroines as role models. The emulation of great Americans served as the most basic underlying principle of COFAS and one that the sales department utilized with great effect through the employment of the silhouette motif.

The popularity of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series peaked in 1954. Christine Govan, a librarian and COFAS author, reported:

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<sup>241</sup> Memorandum by Baker to the Salesmen, January 24, 1952. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material II.

<sup>242</sup> “To Parents, Relatives and Friends of Children,” Letter on the interior of the dust jacket for *Robert Peary, Boy of the North*. Bobbs-Merrill mss.

I wish I had my Kodak the first day that the third grade came into the library. If you have ever seen a ball of bread thrown into a big pool of fish and seen them gather, all a-flutter, around it, you have a fairly good picture of the entire third grade clustered around the shelves where we keep the COFAS series. I have more respect for the formula every day as I see how they devour them and not only read them once but half a dozen times apiece. Their only drawback ... is that it spoils them for harder reading. I have had to limit the fourth grade to one each (and that with another book) or I think they'd just go on reading them for the rest of their lives.<sup>244</sup>

The emphasis on story appealed to youngsters, who found the books easy to read without adult intervention. Children also understood that the adults in their lives heartily approved of the *Childhood of Famous Americans Series*. Govan's observation of the willingness of pupils to read the books time and time again attests to the fact that the series offered more than an engaging story. Affected by their parents' attitudes and fears children sought ways to prove their loyalty to their families and their country. COFAS provided avid young readers with a blueprint for behavior that ensured them acceptance in the dominant culture of anti-communism.

Public concern for literacy swelled in 1955 with the publication of Rudolf Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read—And What You Can Do About It*. Flesch asserted the deleterious effect of word recognition as a pedagogical approach to reading instruction and accused teachers who practiced such methodology of undermining democracy. The Bobbs-Merrill sales department seized upon the public furor caused by *Why Johnny Can't Read* and marketed COFAS as a panacea for children with reading problems. Parents distressed by the "literacy problem" turned to the *Childhood of Famous Americans Series* knowing that their sons and daughters willingly read the books over

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

and over again. The self-esteem of young readers increased as they acquired the ability to read on their own and internalized the principles of Americanism in the process.

The authorial guidelines that tightly controlled the creation of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series frequently collided with post-World War II Americanism as expressed by COFAS authors. In particular, Augusta Stevenson, the series' most prolific writer who produced twenty-three books for COFAS between 1932 and 1959, proved problematic. Stevenson absorbed all of the patriotism and anti-communist sentiment prevalent in American society. Convinced of her duty to save American children from the clutches of communism Stevenson wielded a sense of righteous Americanism in her books and blatantly disregarded the series' criteria. Parents and children eager to be viewed as "one hundred percent American" purchased Stevenson's books and secured her power as a star author. The publication of *Virginia Dare, Mystery Girl* in 1958 serves as the quintessential example of the Bobbs-Merrill Company's willingness to sacrifice its exacting criteria in order to realize a profit and bolster the company's economic woes.

As products of the mid-twentieth century, the volumes of the Childhood of Famous Americans Series reflected the ideals and proclivities of a society engulfed by a strident sense of Americanism played against the foil of a rising and all pervasive anti-communist sentiment. The editorial staff at the Bobbs-Merrill Company struggled to maintain the high editorial standards of the series, which often ran counter to the preferences and prejudices of COFAS authors. The emblematic stories succeeded in transmitting traditional American values to children. Through the Bobbs-Merrill Company's exploitation and marketing of Americanism and literacy, the Childhood of

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<sup>244</sup> Memorandum by Baker to the Salesmen, September 9, 1954. Bobbs-Merrill mss. The Childhood of Famous Americans Series. Promotional Material II.

Famous Americans Series achieved enormous popularity with children desirous of being viewed as valued members of society.

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*Youth, Communication and Libraries: Papers Presented Before the Library Institute at the University of Chicago August 11-16, 1947*. Edited by Frances Henne, Alice Brooks [and] Ruth Ersted. Chicago: American Library Association, 1949.

Zipf, Nance S. [Letter to the Editor]. *Library Journal*, December 1, 1953, 78(21):2050, 2052.

# CURRICULUM VITAE

CINDA ANN MAY

## EDUCATION

Master of Arts in History, Indiana University, Indianapolis, 2005.

Master of Information and Library Science, University of Michigan, 1989.

Master of Arts in English, The University of Texas at Austin, 1983.

Bachelor of Arts in English, University of New Orleans, 1980.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Project Manager. Wabash Valley Visions & Voices: A Digital Memory Project for West Central Indiana. Cunningham Memorial Library, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN. July 2004 to Present.

Coordinator. The Friends of Cunningham Memorial Library. Cunningham Memorial Library, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN. July 2004 to Present.

Rare Books & Special Collections Catalog Librarian. Cunningham Memorial Library. Indiana State University. Terre Haute, IN. January 2003 to July 2004.

Head, Adult Services. Jackson County Public Library. Seymour, IN. September 2002 to January 2003.

Historian. The Westerly Group, Inc. Historic Preservation Consultants. Farmersburg, IN. February to May 2002.

Librarian. Bloomfield-Eastern Greene County Public Library. Bloomfield, IN. May 2001 to February 2002.

Public History Intern. Centennial Celebration History Project. Indiana University School of Medicine. Indiana University. Indianapolis, IN. September 2000 to June 2001.

Consulting Archivist. Carolyn Eisele Archives. Charles Sanders Peirce Editorial Project. Indiana University Purdue University. Indianapolis, IN. May to September 2000.

Public History Intern. Indiana State Museum. Division of Collections and Interpretation. Indianapolis, IN. August 1999 to June 2000.

Assistant Head, Public Services. Lilly Library. Indiana University Libraries. Bloomington, IN. November 1995 to October 1999.

## EXHIBITIONS

“Indiana Coverlets: A Family Business,” an exhibition of nineteenth century coverlets produced by Indiana weavers. Indiana State Museum, Indianapolis, Indiana, May 13 to October 4, 2000.

“‘... *and touch the universal heart.*’ The Appeal of James Whitcomb Riley,” an exhibition in conjunction with activities sponsored by the James Whitcomb Riley Sesquicentennial Committee. Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, May 10 to September 4, 1999.

“Memory and American Culture,” an exhibition in conjunction with American Studies Program conference, Indiana University, Bloomington. Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, April 1998.

“Echoes of the Civil War,” an exhibition in conjunction with Indiana University, Division of Continuing Studies seminar. Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, February and May 1998.

“On Stage Tonight: The Players of London, 1760-1780,” an exhibition of published engravings depicting actors and actresses with contemporary commentary. Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, February 20 to May 15, 1997.

“Land Ho! The Early Exploration of the Americas,” an exhibition of printed narratives and maps of the New World. Washington University Libraries, Saint Louis, Missouri, April 15 to July 31, 1992.

“Bibliomania: A Passion for Books,” an exhibition of notable association copies. Washington University Libraries, Saint Louis, Missouri, September 1 to October 23, 1991.

## SELECTED PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

“Preserving the Past and the Present for the Future: The Wabash Valley Visions & Voices Digital Memory Project.” Indiana Library Federation annual meeting, Indianapolis, Indiana, March 23, 2005.

"Completely Authentic, but not Necessarily True: The Use of Biographical Fiction in the Childhood of Famous Americans Series, 1932-1958." Graduate Seminar in Biography, Department of History, Indiana University, Indianapolis, Indiana, October 15, 2002.

"And a Coverlet to Keep Me Warm at Night: The Rise of Professional Weavers in Indiana, 1815-1870." Switzerland County Historical Society, Vevay, Indiana, July 2, 2001.

"The Civil War as Experienced by John L. Harding, Farmer, Marion County, Indiana." Opening segment of "Civil War Saturday," Indiana University, Division of Continuing Studies, Bloomington, Indiana, March 24, 2001.

"Lifestyles of Victorian Women and Children." Morris-Butler House Docent Training Series, Indianapolis, Indiana, September 19, 2000.

"Evaluating Web Based Resources and Their Place in the Research Process." American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies annual meeting, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, March 26, 1999.

"EAD (Encoded Archival Description): A New Tool for Internet Research." American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies annual meeting, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana, April 3, 1998.

"Agents of Wonder and Learning: Diversion and Instruction in the Eighteenth Century." American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies annual meeting, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, April 11, 1997.

## PUBLICATIONS

"Feature Focus: Coverlets, A Man's Game," *Hoosierisms Quarterly*, Indiana State Museum Foundation, Summer 2000, p. 26-28.

"... and touch the universal heart. The Appeal of James Whitcomb Riley," *The Ryder*, July 16-August 20, 1999, p. 26-29.

"Echoes of the Civil War Resound through the Lilly Library," *The Friends of the Lilly Library Newsletter*, Spring 1999, p. 6-7.

"The Lilly Library, Indiana University, and Its Resources," *East-Central Intelligencer*, September 1998, p. 6-10.

Lewis Carroll at Texas: The Warren Weaver Collection and Related Dodgson Materials at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center. Austin, Texas: Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, c1985.